

St Augustine is one whose character was revealed in his own writings - most candidly and attractively in the account of his life leading up to his conversion to the Faith called 'The Confessions'. One of the greatest books of world history.

This work, to put it simply, is a description by Augustine of his younger self, striving to discover how he could love properly.

He was a brilliant young man intellectually, who explored various areas of philosophy and various religious ideas. He had a great love of truth - but found it difficult to acknowledge when he encountered it.

He was 'in love with loving', as he put it and does not flinch from describing how carnal desire gets mixed up with love - and how that caused him problems.

What is truth? What is love? How can I find truth? How can I love in accordance with what love really is? This is what he was struggling with.

The moment of his decision is memorably recorded: sitting in the garden, reading the Christian Scriptures, he heard some children on the other side of a wall, playing, and singing a little chant - "Take and read, take and read".

What was he reading? He was reading at that moment in S. Paul's epistle to the Romans, "Love is the fulfilling of the law....You know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep...the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness ...but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its designs".

Augustine was familiar with the Scriptures - at some point he must also have read, "Be not hearers of the word only - deceiving yourselves". The word must be heard, taken to heart - acted on. Augustine's decision was made.

After his baptism and then ordination, he immersed himself even further in the Holy Scriptures with sermons and commentaries especially on the writings of S. John. As we have heard today he heard (and expounded to the people) "Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is love". "My dear people, since God has loved us so much, we too should love one another".

And he understood that to love properly is to desire God.

To desire God is the proper expression of love for oneself. To desire God for the other is to love real love for the other. So, love and desire are reconciled - and, one might even say, divinized.

So, to the Gospel. Our Lord speaks to the crowds and to his disciples (not just the disciples as it said in our version) - so it's applying to everyone. We can easily make a connection with what is happening today - the farewell of one priest; the preparation for another.

When a new priest comes to a parish, he is called 'Father', out of respect for his office as God's servant. He is obeyed (sometimes reluctantly) because he has been given the Bishop's authority and so is Master. But very quickly - if both priest and people are true to God - their relationship formed, dependent only, on the love of God, - "Father" becomes a measure of affection rather than mere respect; and grudging obedience gives way to joyful collaboration.

This happens because both you and he know that God is Father and Master and Teacher - and also, appreciate that God uses his servants to express his love in the world, as priests and as his faithful people.

Your new priest, Fr Francis, is coming to bring God's love to you. You will love God by loving him.

My dear friends, I do not want to leave you - because I love you. - But I must leave you - and that too is because I love you.