

Homily for the Feast of St. Augustine, 28 August 2017

Boarbank Hall



An enduring feature of the character and life of St. Augustine of Hippo was friendship. He loved the company of his friends, and was never happier when studying, praying and relaxing with them. In his Confessions he leaves a memorable description of the loss of a friend when he was an adolescent, and the desolation and emptiness he suffered as a consequence. The absence of this nameless friend haunted him for a long time.

After his baptism by St. Ambrose in Milan, Easter 387, his sole wish was to return to his original home in Tagaste, Africa, and establish there a lay monastery where he and his close companions could search for God through prayer and study. As we know, Almighty God had other plans, but those lay in the future. For Augustine, this search for God was a common enterprise in which all his friends played their part, not merely a single individual effort.

The Rule makes clear the emphasis the saint placed on what we call the common life, and its ideal of having all things in common. As we know, he took his cue from St. Luke's description of the first Christian community in Jerusalem, who were of one mind and heart (Acts 4:32). At the centre of this life in common was of course Christ himself, who was its source and head, the one who held it together. Mutual charity was to be the hallmark of those who commit themselves to live together in Christ's name.

Echoing St. Paul, St. Augustine declares that the yardstick of any progress in community living lay in seeking the good of our neighbour in preference to one's own interests. We find fulfilment, as we might say today, in being above all a good community person. Augustine had the insight to pinpoint the truth for his communities that it is through mutual charity in common living that we arrive at Christian perfection. We find Christ in our service of others.

The Saint begins his Rule with the words *'Before anything else, let us love God and our neighbour, for this is what has been principally laid down for us.'* A description of a religious community, then, for Augustine, might be: those living together in mutual friendship and support, united in a common search for God. We pray today for this Boarbank community and for all Augustinian communities throughout the world that they be of one mind and one heart in the search for God. Amen!

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