

*Augustine*  
*Bishop of Hippo, Teacher of the Faith*

*August 28*

The most outstanding of early Christian thinkers in the western church, Augustine had a profound influence on the medieval world, and a continuing effect even beyond the period of the Reformation.

Augustine was born in 354 in Thagaste in North Africa. His parents, Patricius and Monica, were ambitious for him and struggled financially to obtain the best possible education for him. While at university in Carthage, he developed a deep thirst for truth, which took him first into Manichaeism, a dualistic gnostic system of thought.

In 383 Augustine moved to Rome and soon obtained a position as professor of rhetoric at what was then the western imperial capital, Milan. By this time he had become dissatisfied with the Manichaean pseudo-scientific explanations of reality. He was greatly influenced by Bishop Ambrose, who introduced Augustine to Neoplatonic thought and a more spiritualised interpretation of Scripture than he had met in North Africa.

Like many of his time, Augustine saw that a commitment to Christianity was a total commitment to a disciplined life-style, dedicated to God. He struggled within himself over the cost of this commitment, but was eventually “converted” in 386. Abandoning the prospect of marriage and a brilliant public career, he received baptism from Ambrose at Easter in 387. Augustine resolved to return to North Africa and to live a monastic life of contemplation and prayer.

While looking for a suitable place for a monastic community, he was made a presbyter by the people of the church in Hippo, and became bishop of Hippo in 395, a position he held until his death in 430. In addition to his many responsibilities as bishop, Augustine carried on an extensive literary output in letters, treatises and sermons. He wrote at length against the Manichaeans and became embroiled in major debates in the western church over the nature of the church. The Donatists, a group of rigorists in North Africa, maintained a doctrine of the church as a body that must exhibit the purity of its life. Augustine argued that the church’s purity is a gift of God, not something we attain, and therefore there is room in the church for the sinner. Augustine entered into a similar long debate with the Pelagians over the question of moral effort and its relation to God’s saving grace. Where Pelagius was the moral reformer urging responsibility, Augustine was the redeemed sinner who knows that it is all God’s work in us.

Augustine’s most famous works are his *Confessions*, in which he uses his own personal life as an example of God’s working, and the *City of God*, a work occasioned by the sack of Rome in 410. This event shocked both pagans and Christians, whose sense of the favour of the gods or God was bound up with the city. Augustine answered with a view of the church as mingled here with the earthly city that is characterised by pride, but at the same time is on pilgrimage to the heavenly city of God that is characterised by love.

### **For Liturgical Use**

Augustine, the most influential figure of the early church in the west, was born in North Africa in 354. His search for truth led him eventually to acceptance of costly discipleship. He was baptised in Milan in 387 and returned to North Africa, becoming bishop of Hippo in 395. His *Confessions* is a classic spiritual autobiography, and his *City of God* shaped western thinking about the meaning of historical events. Augustine also wrote extensively on grace

against those who looked for visible evidence in themselves or the church of their standing before God. He died in 430.

### **Sentence**

Glorious things are spoken of you, Zion, city of our God. Singers and dancers alike shall proclaim, "In you all find their home." *Psalm 87:3,6*

### **Collects**

Gracious and everloving God,  
the end of all our searching,  
you gave to your servant Augustine  
gifts of heart and mind  
to seek after you and to serve you;  
grant us in our pilgrimage here on earth  
to walk in the light of your truth,  
and at the last to rest in you  
and know you as you are;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gracious, reconciling God,  
you gave comfort to Augustine,  
wrestling with his sense of sin;  
give us confidence to believe your creation is good,  
and help our restless hearts  
to find their rest in you.

**Psalms**                      84                                      119:89-96

### **Readings**

Proverbs 2:6-11	Wisdom a gift from God
Romans 13:8-14	Put on the Lord Jesus
Matthew 7:21-27	Like a wise builder

### **Post Communion Sentence**

Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. *Philippians 3:20*