

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

Exodus 17: 8-13

Psalm 121: 1-8

II Tim 3:14-4:2

Luke 18: 1-8

Arthur P. Purcaro, O.S.A.

On November 13th Augustinians around the world will be celebrating the 1650th anniversary of the birth of St. Augustine.

St. Augustine, born in 354 in the north of Africa, is identified with the restless heart and the constant search for goodness and beauty. He is known as the doctor of grace, having experienced the transforming effects of grace in his own life. The spiritual descendants of Augustine – who number about three thousand and are currently present in 47 countries - strive to share the fruits of our common search for God with the people we serve.

If Augustine were born in northern Africa this year, instead of 1650 years ago, just what would be his chances of surviving and being able to share with humanity the fruits of his relentless search for truth?

The statistics certainly do not favor a child born in Africa today: one in every five is chronically undernourished. This affects their overall health, their ability to learn, their vision. Can we imagine an Augustine with a listless, rather than restless, heart?

And so, the Augustinians are promoting a Hunger Awareness Campaign as a way of celebrating this jubilee of Augustine's birth. When faced with the fact of hunger, many people question just what we can do, as individuals and as a worshipping community, to face the challenge to end hunger in our world.

The first step is perhaps to become convinced that we truly can do something, that it really is possible to eradicate the scourge of hunger from our planet. In fact, over the past decade, the number of people who die each day from hunger related diseases has decreased from 35,000 to 24,000; still an abominable and unacceptable figure, but proof that we truly can do something to achieve the objective that was established by world leaders when they signed the Millennium Development Goals in the year 2000.

The struggle to end world hunger can be likened to Moses' struggle to keep his arms raised in the face of adversity. The temptation is to let down our guard. In fact, we are combating not just hunger, but also indifference, a sense of impotence, and even

unbridled selfishness. Those are not attributes somewhere out there, but right here, within our very own hearts.

St. Paul reminds us that we need to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ in season or out. It's not always easy to bring up a topic such as hunger and its consequences, either in our family or among our friends, but it was often on the lips of Augustine both within his own community and from the pulpit when he preached. How much more significant it is now to bring up the topic, when we truly have the resources to eradicate hunger from our country and from our planet.

Jesus himself encourages us to pray continuously, without losing heart. He has identified himself entirely with those who are hungry and has made their plight his own, stating ever so clearly that when we feed the hungry we are feeding Christ himself. Feeding the hungry is a significant work of charity. But wouldn't it be more significant if there were no people who were hungry? That's the goal. And that is more a matter of justice or the transformation of sinful structures which allow for so many people to slip through the safety net and go hungry.

This weekend around the globe individuals, groups and nations are remembering World Food Day. As we celebrate Eucharist in which we anticipate the heavenly banquet in which all will finally be truly satisfied, this is an appropriate time to thank God for the abundant gift of nourishment and to commit ourselves to encouraging our elected leaders to fulfill the promise made to eliminate hunger from our planet.