

In the Christian church, St. Augustine is considered one of the most important figures in terms of his influences on faith. Among other things, this 4<sup>th</sup> century church father/scholar /philosopher /bishop helped to establish the doctrine of original sin which is the foundation of our Christian faith. Many of his writings cover all the areas of theology and philosophy, morality and spirituality that have become standard in the Christian Church. His books such as *City of God* and *Confessions* read like a catalogue listing in a library. Another book entitled "On Christian doctrine" is the first text book ever written on preaching which I talk about in my seminary classes.

I would say that because we had Augustine some 1600 years ago, we have all the systemic understanding of Christian faith you and I have learned. Period!

Whether we like it or not, we talk about sin in church; many times we point our fingers to ourselves talking about how bad we are; that is the reason why some people do not like to come to church. But without knowing who we are and where we are coming from, we will never know who we can turn to; we will never know where we can go from where we are!

The truth is that because we know who we are, we also know who we need. We need God; we need the love of God; we need the mercy of God. Our complicated lives always make us exhausted spiritually and physically. We need a well from which we can draw water that nourish us; we need a fountain that has living water for our thirsty souls; we need a refuge where we can come and hide ourselves so that we get protection; we need a rock on which we can put our sore and

tired feet. That is Jesus; that is the love of God; that is the forgiveness of God. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28)

But sometimes we don't know or we forget or we do not want to hear such an invitation. That's what happened to Augustine when he was young. Even though he had been brought up by a mother of faith, Augustine just had a rough life; he volunteered to be a wayward child.

One day Augustine sat weeping in the garden of a friend. He wanted desperately to begin a new life; yet, he was not willing to make a break with the women, wine, and song that were a part of his old life. As he sat there weeping and struggling, however, he heard a child in a neighboring house singing in Latin, "Take up and read! Take up and read!"

Taking up the Bible which lay at his friend's side, his eyes fell on the words of today's passage from Romans 13.

'Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.' Augustine then gave this testimony. "I neither wished nor needed to read further. With the end of that sentence, as though the light of assurance had poured into my heart, all the shades of doubt vanished away."

From that day forward, Augustine's life was changed. He became Saint Augustine, the brilliant theologian, one of the greatest of leaders in the early church.

God is love; it does not matter how bad or not-good we were in the past, God wants to bring us to light; God wants to scatter all the shades in our hearts; God wants to make us day-time people, the people of light.

God forgives us; God restores us; God transforms us; God wants to bring us back to who we should be. As creator, he knows what he intended us to be.

First of all, we are created in the image of God; so we have to love ourselves; we are not just we but the ones in whom the spirit of God dwells; we are of God; so we need to treat ourselves with decency and respect; our bodies and souls are not ours; they belong to God.

The second thing is that we are created to love others as ourselves; we are created to live along with others; we need to love and forgive others as God forgives us.

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus uses a powerful analogy to explain this message of forgiveness. He says, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

A small act of showing love to others is never a small thing; it is huge in heaven; God knows and remembers it. I know forgiving someone is one of the hardest things we can do; but if

we could do it, if we try to do it, Jesus says, you are untying a knot in heaven. Jesus says if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it will be done for them by God in heaven.

If two of you show that you guys really forgive each other, that you accept each other, you are untying a knot in heaven.

If two of you can show the world that you can love each other out of animosity, that you treat each other regardless of who they are, I will be there in your midst.

Show me something! I don't care whether you are a liberal or a conservative or a fundamentalist; show me that you are walking your talk! I want to see a result, the result of reconciliation; I want to see your faith is bearing a fruit right here on earth; I want to see the world is getting better because of you.

The heaven is already full of knots because of hate we have for each other in this world; God is asking us to be a people who can solve this problem!

So loose; don't bind! Untie the knots.

God has already forgiven our sins;  
Can you also forgive? Can we be a person of peace?  
Can you untie the knots?  
These are the words I hear from Jesus today.  
May these words nourish your souls and minds.  
Amen.