



FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT 2023

Have mercy on us,
God, in your kindness.

Reflection and Prayer for Lent with Sunday readings and a spiritual teacher
from our Catholic tradition - St Augustine.

SIGN OF THE CROSS.

Have mercy on us, God, in your kindness.

FROM THE READINGS

First Reading: The Lord God fashioned man of dust from the soil.

Then God breathed into his nostrils a breath of life ... *Genesis 2:7*

Psalm: Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.

In your compassion blot out my offence.

O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin.

Psalm 50/51:1-2

Gospel: Then Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the desert to be put to the test by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was hungry, and the tester came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But he replied, 'Scripture says: Human beings live not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' The devil then took him to the holy city and set him on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down; for scripture says: He has given his angels orders about you, and they will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone.' Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. And he said to him, 'I will give you all these, if you fall at my feet and do me homage.' Then Jesus replied, 'Away with you, Satan! For scripture says: The Lord your God is the one to whom you must do homage, him alone you must serve.' Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels appeared and looked after him.

Matthew 4:1-11

FROM SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354-430)

Augustine wrote about God's grace, love and power in human life, when many thought Christian living was all about will power. He was born to a Christian mother, Monica, and non-Christian father, in a small town in Algeria. He studied to a high level, began teaching in Rome and befriended a woman who was his partner for fifteen years. Their son, Adeodatus, later died while

still in his teens. Augustine wanted to learn about the meaning of life and what it is to be good. He tried philosophical and religious groups. One day, in 386 CE, he heard a children's song with the words "Pick it up and read it." Realising it could be God's message for him, Augustine found a bible. St Paul's call to a life based on Jesus Christ (Romans 13:13-14) had a huge impact on him. He listened to the preaching of Bishop Ambrose of Milan and, at age 33 in 387CE, together with Adeodatus and a friend, Alypius, he was baptised during the Easter Vigil. Augustine discovered that happiness and meaning are found in God who had loved him all his life. Augustine became a priest and Bishop of Hippo (today's Annaba) in Northern Africa. His writings, including his personal story, *Confessions*, continue to inspire people today.

AUGUSTINE'S WORDS

You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. *Confessions AD 397 - 400.*

I was tossed by every wind, but you guided me as a helmsman steers a ship, by routes I did not know. *Confessions AD 397 - 400.*

You called, you shouted, you burst through my deafness. *Confessions AD 397 - 400.*

We shall be made truly free when God has fashioned us, formed us, recreated us, not as human beings (he has already done that), but as good human beings. His grace is doing that right now, that we may be a new creation in Christ Jesus ... *The Enchiridion AD 420.*

If you want to see God, you should consider that God is love (1 John 4:8). What is the face of love? What is its form, its height, its feet, its hands? No one can say — and yet love has feet, for they lead to the church; it has hands, for they minister to the poor; it has eyes, for through them the needy become visible. *Homily on the First Epistle of John*

It is grace that enables us to know what we should do and grace that enables us to do it. By grace we both believe what should be loved and love what we believe. *On the Grace of Christ.*

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

- **Ask** for God's guidance.
- **Read** the scripture passages and words of St Augustine, aloud or silently.
- **Reflect and pray**, stopping to ponder any 'stand out' words or phrases. 10 mins
- **Respond** 10-15 mins

Individuals: Write or sit quietly with your reflections.

Groups: Share your responses and listen to others. 2-3 mins each

- o What stands out for you?
- o What do you want to take with you?

- **Express a hope for the future.**

HOLY SPIRIT PRAYER OF ST AUGUSTINE

*Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.*

*Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.*

*Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
that I love but what is holy.*

*Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.*

*Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy.*

St Augustine

