

Fifth Sunday of Eastertide

Dear Parishioners,

St. Augustine thought a great deal about what it meant to be a Christian. His great desire was to be a teacher. In order to equip himself as a teacher he sat first at the feet of others, of those whom he considered more intelligent and more learned than himself. He read extensively the works of the Roman orator Cicero and the latter remained a model for Augustine throughout his life. He only knew Cicero through the speeches, letters and works of his which survived. Yet Augustine also had living contact with one of the greatest teachers of late Antiquity and, through going to Milan and sitting at his feet, he became a disciple of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. It was Ambrose who christened Augustine and who privileged him with his friendship, although it has to be said that he always kept his distance from the young Berber from North Africa who displayed such a sharp intelligence and such an active curiosity.

Having learned so much from Cicero, Ambrose and others during his younger years, Augustine was also keen to pass on advice himself when his advice was sought. One of the pieces of advice for which he later became most famous was his pithy response to someone who asked him how to live, how to act righteously and still be sure one was abiding by the commandments. *Ama, et fac quod vis. Love and then do what you like.* That was Augustine's rule of thumb. This week we hear advice given by Jesus to his closest friends at the Last Supper: *Love one another.* That advice has remained at the heart of Christianity ever since. But, it can legitimately be asked, have Christians managed to put Jesus' advice into practice, have they taken Augustine's counsel to heart?

We must understand Augustine's advice correctly. He does not give us a licence to do whatever we want so long as our disposition is loving. He challenges us to ask ourselves what loving another person, other people or whatever human being crosses our path in life involves. He challenges us to always ask whether what we do to, or desire for, our neighbour is good for them or is in line with what they wish for themselves. In fact Augustine's advice, no more than Jesus' counsel to his disciples, is deceptively simple. As any husband or wife will tell you, as any parent with children will affirm, or as anyone living in community – religious or other – it takes a lifetime to discover what loving another person involves, it takes years to appreciate what it brings them happiness and fulfilment; it is one of the most difficult, most challenging and most risk-laden of human enterprises. And yet as Jesus knew, as Augustine discerned and as most of us who try to love discover every day, loving brings the richest of rewards. Jesus promised his friends that he would see to it that they could enjoy life to the full, and for him – and for us who are his disciples – love is the key.

Father Patrick