

*Readings*

Acts 7:55-60

Ps 97:1-2, 6-7, 9

Rev 22:12-14, 16-17, 20

Jn 17:20-26

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Let us consider for a moment the great gift of God of our human soul.

The soul is the divine animating principle that quickens the human heart and evokes a living principle of what it means to become a human being. It is the remnant of divinity that God leaves within each human being – a remnant of heaven that settles and expands into our lives year by year, season by season, prayer by prayer, as an awakening of the consciousness of the real presence of God. Not only do we belong to God, but God belongs to us, and this relationship can never be separated.

The soul is the supernatural “organ” within us that, as we profess each Sunday in the Creed, gives us the grace to “believe in all things visible and invisible.” It is the soul that facilitates the gift of discernment, the source of understanding, and the divine remnant that quickens the spirit to recognize that God is with us.

The soul also has a very practical purpose for us to consider. Saint Augustine describes our experience of searching for God as a journey. On that journey – through prayer, the liturgies of the Church, charity, and reading sacred Scripture – we are continually called to move forward. As Augustine says, we are called “to become what we are not yet.” It is the Spirit who expedites that learning from within.

Today’s first reading from the Acts of the Apostles offers us a perspective to learn something of the courage and strength of Saint Stephen as he prepared to undergo a martyr’s death: “Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And Stephen said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God’” (Acts 7:55-60). Saint Stephen’s discernment of the Holy Spirit gave him the courage to speak God’s truth and to accept death

with peace and resolve. Throughout our lives God shares that strength and courage with us, teaching us to trust in good times and in bad. What an amazing and sustaining gift of the Holy Spirit!

The soul is an eternal supernatural gift from God. It continually seeks from within, and assists us in recognizing the cosmic reality of the largeness of God – something our brains cannot fully comprehend. The Holy Spirit teaches our soul the mind of Jesus as we grow in holiness and charity. Consider all of the ways in which we take on divine characteristics over the course of our lives as we are called to imitation of Jesus.

We Augustinians are experiencing a particular grace as we celebrate our brother in Augustine becoming Pope Leo XIV: opening new pathways to share the Augustinian charism globally. Augustinian spirituality begins with the value of learning through meaningful experiences. For Augustine, coming to know Jesus through the everyday events of our lives is the pathway to knowing God.

As Pope Leo said in his inaugural liturgy: “St. Augustine fixed his gaze on this mystery and in it he found the Truth he was so ardently seeking. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, the Sacrificed and Risen Lamb, is the Face of God-Love for every human being on his journey along the paths of time towards eternity.” Our soul unites with Augustine on the search for truth and meaning.

Today’s Gospel (John 17:20-26) offers us a glimpse into God’s hope and God’s plan for those who grow in trust and love with Jesus: “Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” Clearly God is searching us and longing to heal the wounds we inflict on our souls. In this passage, we are reminded of how throughout our lives the Spirit’s generous and gracious gifts abound: abundance, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and love.

And yet, why can we not live always in that Divine abundance? Too often we can fall into a scarcity mentality, seeking control, becoming judgmental, ideological, or accusatory, resentful and unforgiving. This mindset is a temptation of the Enemy: convincing ourselves that we know the mind of God better than others and consequently pointing our fingers at others.

Augustinian spirituality has a remedy for us by calling us to healthy humility and generous mercy. It reminds us that we are imperfect and utterly dependent on God’s grace.

When we recognize this abundance within our soul, compassion is the natural result. We are not called to judge others but to welcome them into the spaciousness of our own grace-filled lives – to forgive, to console, and to share the mercy we ourselves have received.

Jesus reveals that God's very nature is restorative, generous, and merciful. He was willing to die for our small-mindedness so that we might become spacious and welcoming. During this Easter season, we are invited to live more fully the soul's journey of life, death, and resurrection modeled by Jesus. The Holy Spirit prompts our soul with discernment so our hearts and minds learn and may be transformed. Where would we be without the learning we are given in prayer, in service of others, and participation in the liturgies of our church?

Let us encourage one another to listen to the Holy Spirit so that we may come to know the mind of God: the gift that Jesus made manifest.

May we find meaning, purpose, peace, and charity in all we do. Let us be good students of the miraculous teacher, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Blessings.