

Homily based on the readings from August 28, 2025 (1 Thessalonians 3.7-13; Matthew 24.42-51)

It has been quite a year for Saint Augustine of Hippo. In all seriousness, even though Augustine died nearly 1600 years ago, his influence within the Church has never been more apparent. As you may be aware, our new Holy Father, Pope Leo, is an Augustinian – a member of the Order of Saint Augustine – a group of mendicant friars who are dedicated to following the Rule of Saint Augustine. In addition to the standard requirements of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the rule mandates an unwavering commitment to communal life and common prayer. In fact, recent reports have indicated that the Holy Father is planning to establish a small community of Augustinian friars in the papal apartments – essentially creating a tiny monastery within the Vatican.

Even though we are still in the early days of this pontificate, Saint Augustine's impact on Pope Leo is already plain to see. The pope's official motto – “In the One, we are one” – is essentially a quotation

from Augustine's *Exposition on the Book of Psalms*. His coat of arms includes an image of a flaming heart pierced by an arrow, resting on an uncovered book – a direct reference to a phrase from Augustine's *Confessions*: “You have pierced my heart with your Word.” In fact, there are even rumors that the pope seriously considered taking the name *Augustine* rather than *Leo*, although there is no way of knowing for certain whether that is true.

All of these connections raise an obvious question – *why?* What is the reason for the Holy Father's devotion to this particular north African bishop, who lived and died during the waning years of the Roman Empire. Over the past two millennia, the Church has produced a countless procession of *profound* and *prolific* theologians – 37 of whom (soon to be 38) have been recognized as Doctors of the Church. What makes Augustine, in particular, so special?

Without taking anything away from anyone else, the most distinctive aspect of Augustine's theology is that it is not really *theology* at all – it is

a *love* letter. The best way to appreciate this point is to reflect on the most famous passage from his writings:

Late have I loved you, O beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you, they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you; now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.

These words are timeless, because the longing they represent transcends the bounds of tribe, tongue, people, and nation. They capture the deepest desire of *all* human beings: to bury ourselves – completely and forever – within the all-loving, all-giving, all-*merciful* embrace of Jesus

Christ. That is a model that *each* of us – from the newly baptized infant to the Holy Father in Rome – must dedicate our lives to pursuing.