

Toward a World Without Hunger

Reflections from Saint Augustine

Contemplating Our World Where God Is Present

We open our eyes, our ears and our hearts:



- To observe the reality of hunger in our neighborhood, our country, our world
- To listen to the cries of the poor, and to dialogue with individuals, groups and organization that are striving to respond to the needs of those who are hungry
- To allow compassion to move us to act in a simple yet effective fashion by simply [writing a letter](#) to encourage our leaders to finance the policy to halve the number of hungry people by 2015.

God's Word and Augustine's Interpretation

God's Word and Augustine's Interpretation shed light on the situation:

From Sermon 345 of Saint Augustine: *Command the rich of this world not to be haughty in their ideas, nor to have their hopes set on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living God, who bestows all things on us abundantly for our enjoyment. Let them be rich in good works, let them be ready to give things away, and to share; let them store up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may lay hold of true life. --1 Tm 6:17-19*

Yes, let them be rich; but in what way? In good works; let them be ready to give things away, because they don't lose what they give away; let them share with those who haven't got things.

This life is a dream life; these riches are, as it were, flowing through our sleep. Listen to the psalm, O poorest of the poor, Mr. Rich Man: They have slept their sleep, and have found nothing in their hands, all the men of riches. --Psalm 76:5

Sometimes, too, a beggar lying on the ground, shivering with cold, but still overcome with sleep, will dream of untold wealth, and rejoice and grow proud in his sleep, and not deign to recognize his ragged old father, and until he wakes up he's rich.

So when he goes to sleep, he finds something false and unreal to rejoice in; when he wakes up he finds something only too real and true to grieve over.

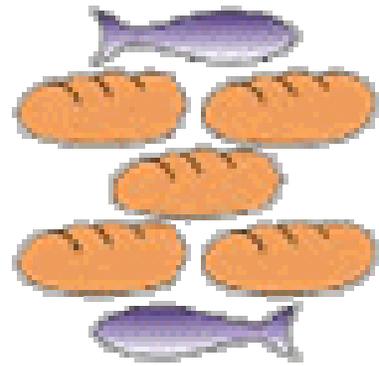
So the rich man when he dies is like the poor man when he wakes up, after seeing untold wealth in his sleep. I mean, there was that man too, clothed in purple and fine linen (Lk 16:19), a certain rich man who was neither named nor fit to be named, a despiser of the poor man lying at his gate. He was clothed in purple and fine linen, as the gospel testifies, and he feasted sumptuously every day.

He died, he was buried; he woke up, and found himself in the flames. So he slept his sleep, and found nothing in his hands, that man of riches, because he had done nothing good with his hands. So then, riches are sought for the sake of life, not life for the sake of riches.

Do you love them? Send them on ahead where you can follow them; or else, when you are loving them on earth, you either lose them while you are still alive, or leave them behind you when you're dead. Where?

You can see, of course, what you bury in the earth? Burying in the earth gives you a nice sense of security, while handing over to the one who made heaven and earth leaves you feeling anxious? Well, keep it where you like; if you can find a better custodian than Christ, entrust it to him.

So why have any doubts about whom you can give to? It's the one who said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" It's the same one who says to you, "Feed me on earth." Saul was raging, and yet it was Christ that he was persecuting.



The same applies to you also; pay out on earth, and it is Christ you are feeding. Because this question which bothers you was foreseen by the Lord himself; those who are to be set on his right will also be bothered by it, and when he says, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat," they will reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry?" And straightaway they will hear, "When you did it for one of these least of mine, you did it for me." --Mt 25:35-40

You want to have these riches, in order to have the means of tickling your palate and filling your belly, because you fade away, otherwise; the one who will make you really and truly rich, is the one who grants you never to be hungry forever.

Let us lead good lives, and for our good life let us not set our hopes on the fleeting good things of this earth. Earthly well-being is a cheap exchange for a good life.

Prophetic Action

Prophetic action to make God's presence more readily manifest in our world:

Justice, as Augustine understands it, requires right relationships, including a more perfect distribution of the goods of the world in order to reflect more clearly God's love for all of creation.

A person is "just when he seeks to use things only for the end for which God appointed them, and to enjoy God as the end of all, while he enjoys himself and his friend in God and for God". --**City of God 15:22**

Our relationship with God urges us to see one another in a different fashion: we belong to one another and are responsible for one another. We are called to go beyond indifference and even discrimination and rejection in order to establish a more full communion, in the image and likeness of the Triune God.

Peace, for Augustine, results when the parties concerned agree to work with and not against each other.

All human beings seek peace, Augustine reminds us, but we only rarely seek true justice. True justice - that is, right relationships - demands of us to be aware of and involved in rectifying the situation which allows 24,000 people to die of hunger each day.

Earthly peace carries with it an obligation to use it well. On occasion, war is appropriate and even necessary: to preserve and recapture peace. War is a last resort, always, not meant to achieve justice so much as to minimize injustice. A “just” war seeks a “just” settlement: a redistribution of the goods of the world which would allow all to eat and nourish themselves.

We are in the midst of a just war on hunger; the leaders of the world’s nations having established as a goal to diminish by half those who suffer poverty and hunger by the year 2015.

Evil, as Augustine understands it, is a falling away from a good, a lack or an absence of good, a failure to do or to be something. The misuse of freedom (which Augustine calls “sin”) is a fundamental perversion of the orientation of the will away from God and towards self.

Sin is self-directing of the will toward the created world and away from the Creator. Sin is love misplaced, misdirected, corrupted. Sin makes some part of the essentially good created world the ultimate object of one’s affection.

The goods of the world are meant to be used and enjoyed by all people. They are not an end in themselves, to be accumulated by some and beyond reach to many.

Self-centeredness blinds us to the needs of others. Advent is a special time dedicated to preparing to recognize God’s presence and absence in ourselves and in our midst.

God is more present when we share with others what God has bestowed for the good of all. God is present in us when we act against selfishness and on behalf of the common good.

We can freely choose to do good, to help achieve the [Millennium Goal](#) (Opens new window) of halving hunger, by [writing to encourage our nation’s leaders](#) to help finance initiatives to reduce hunger in our country and on a worldwide basis.

It is within our power to do something to reduce hunger. During this special season may we bring those who are hungry to mind when we pray, when we eat.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. How familiar are you with the social doctrine of the Church, rooted in the Bible and inspired by Augustine and other Fathers of the Church? Have you found a way to bring this to other people?
2. Hunger is a reality on a local as well as a global level. How aware are you of the hunger situation both on a local level as well as internationally? Can you identify the principal causes for hunger on a local as well as global scale?
3. In your local parish church community, as in any Christian family, you no doubt have some way of providing charity for those in need. Is there something you can do on the level of justice, or transformation of society, to reflect better our Christian principles as identified by Augustine in the sermon presented here?
4. Most specifically, and of the utmost importance for the success of the Augustinian Hunger Awareness Campaign, we urge you (and through you, as many people as possible) to [write a letter](#) to those responsible in your national government in support of the Millennium Development Goal regarding hunger. This is a concrete activity you can do today to help reduce the number of people who will die of hunger.

http://www.midwestaugustinians.org/justpaxhunger_aug.html