

828 SAINT AUGUSTINE, BISHOP & DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH (AUGUST 28TH, 2021)

Readings: 1 John 4: 7 – 16: 1; Psalm 118(119): 9 – 14; Matthew 23: 8 – 12.

Augustine was born in North Africa in AD 354, the eldest child of Monica, whose feast fell yesterday, and Patricius, who was a local councillor. He was brought up to value the classics of Latin literature. Although he was registered as a catechumen, he followed his father's example by delaying baptism. When he was about sixteen he went to Carthage where he studied rhetoric (the art of persuasive speaking) with a view to becoming a lawyer. He soon gave up this idea and became a university teacher. He was influenced by Manicheism, an Eastern religion with a dualist theory which divided all things into opposing realms of light and darkness, and he dismissed orthodox Christianity with its doctrine of God-made-man. He formed a relationship with a concubine, with whom he had a son, and which was to last some fifteen years.

In 384, aged 29, he went secretly to Rome to escape his mother's control, but she followed him there and again when he moved to Milan. They both began to be influenced by Ambrose, the bishop of Milan. Augustine dismissed his female companion but rejected his mother's wish that he should marry. He began to be disillusioned with Manicheism and turned to a philosophy which taught of the relationship between God, the Word (or *Logos*) and the world: But he still found this philosophy lacked the power of the Christian doctrine of *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. He also hesitated to give himself wholly to the Christian faith, for fear of believing untruth.

In his *Confessions* he writes *Weeping in the most bitter sorrow of my heart I heard a voice which repeated again and again "Take and read, take and read"*. He took up the book he had been reading, Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, and was moved by what he read (chapter 13 verse 13) to make a break with his past life.

In September 386 Augustine, his mother, his brother and some friends retired to a country house, where he spent time in prayer, preparing for his baptism which was celebrated by Bishop Ambrose on Easter Eve 387. Later that year he returned to Africa [*See the Reflection for yesterday*].

In 391 Augustine was ordained priest, and in 396 he became Bishop of Hippo. He died in 430, as the Arian Vandals were besieging the city. He was buried in Hippo, but his body was later taken by exiled catholic bishops to Sardinia and eventually to Pavia, where it is now enshrined.