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A true conversion

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St. Augustine had to travel a long way with many struggles. One thing that was particularly difficult for him was to overcome the appetites of the flesh. We will now listen to a passage from Book Eight of Augustine's Confessions, which gives us a moving insight into the decisive moment of his conversion: It is with great joy that we look today at St. Augustine, whose conversion brought so much blessing to the Church. We can be sure that the prayer of his mother, St. Monica, and her struggle for him played an important role in Augustine's finally finding the way to God. He himself wrote down his struggle in his so-called "Confessions", a book that is always worth reading. He began to write it after the light of faith had shone on him; after he had understood how to live the following of Christ.

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“The very toys of toys, and vanities of vanities, my old mistresses, still enthralled me; they shook my fleshly garment, and whispered softly, do you part with us? And from that moment shall we no more be with you for ever? And from that moment shall not this or that be lawful for you for ever? And what did they suggest to me in the words this or that? What is it that they suggested, O my God? Let Your mercy avert it from the soul of Your servant. What impurities did they suggest! (...)

Yet they did delay me, so that I hesitated to burst and shake myself free from them, and to leap over whither I was called — an unruly habit saying to me, do you think you can live without them? (...)

But when a profound reflection had, from the secret depths of my soul, drawn together and heaped up all my misery before the sight of my heart, there arose a mighty storm, accompanied by as mighty a shower of tears. Which, that I might pour forth fully, with its natural expressions, I stole away from Alypius; for it suggested itself to me that solitude was fitter for the business of weeping. (...) (...) I, throwing myself under a fig tree, I do not know how, released the rein to tears, two rivers flowing from my eyes, your acceptable sacrifice. And though not in these words, but in the same sense, I said to you many things like these: "And you, Lord, how long! How long, Lord, must you be angry! Remember no more of our former iniquities. "I felt myself still captive to them, and I uttered piteous cries, "How long, how long, how long, tomorrow, tomorrow! Why not today? Why not put an end to my shame this very hour?"

I said these things and wept with the bitterest contrition of my heart. But behold, I heard from the next house a voice, as of a boy or girl, singing and repeating many times: "Take and read, take and read" (...) So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon. For I had heard of Antony, that, accidentally coming in while the gospel was being read, he received the admonition as if what was read were addressed to him, Go and sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me. And by such oracle was he immediately converted unto You. So quickly I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I put down the volume of the apostles, when I rose thence. I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell — Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended — by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart — all the gloom of doubt vanished away."

Let us now listen to the account of that moment when St. Augustine shares with his mother, St. Monica, the experience he had just lived through, for the grateful convert now understood how much she had suffered for his sake. His mother's joy is all the greater!

“Hence we go in to my mother. We make it known to her — she rejoices. We relate how it came to pass — she leaps for joy, and triumphs, and blesses You, who art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think; for she perceived You to have given her more for me than she used to ask by her pitiful and most doleful groanings. For Thou so converted me unto Yourself, that I sought neither a wife, nor any other of this world's hopes, — standing in that rule of faith in which Thou, so many years before, had showed me unto her in a vision. And you turned her grief into a gladness...”

This moving testimony of St. Augustine, who after a long struggle returned to God, shows us the characteristics of a true conversion; the conversion from a life of sin to the holy faith. When the love of God overcame him, Augustine left his old life behind him once and for all.

It could no longer hold him back, although he would certainly have to fight on.

A true conversion then leads to a concrete following of Christ, as happened in an exemplary way with St. Augustine. It is truly a resurrection from the dead! Now, the Holy Spirit continues to work in the convert and introduces him to his vocation. In the case of Augustine, we see with amazement all the fruits that a life after conversion can produce. To this day it continues to have an effect: in his writings, in his sermons, in the monastic order he wrote, and, of course, in his example, which is to encourage the one who is in search of truth.

Let us end this meditation with a beautiful phrase of our saint:

"Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you."

St. Augustine was late in giving all his love to God, but, thanks be to God, it was not too late...