Thursday of Sixth Week of Easter

DESIRE

"Chastity, or cleanness of heart, holds a glorious and distinguished place among the virtues, because she, alone, enables man to see God; hence Truth itself said, ‘Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.’" - Saint Augustine

ST AUGUSTINE

St. Augustine struggled a lot with lustful desire although later became chaste. From adolescence to the age of 32, as he later detailed in the Confessions, Augustine was a frequent loser in the battle with lustful passions. He later wrote that it was at the age of 16 that “the frenzy gripped me and I surrendered myself entirely to lust.” As an 18-year-old student at Carthage, Augustine reveled in promiscuity. Sex had become an obsession for him. “From a perverted act of will,” he wrote, “desire had grown, and when desire is given satisfaction, habit is forged; and when habit passes unresisted, a compulsive urge sets in.” He had allowed his desires to lead him away from God rather than allowing his desires to lead him towards God. After a year of promiscuity in that university city, Augustine settled down with a mistress. Although he never revealed her name, he remained with her for more than a decade. She bore him a son named Adeodatus. His mother, St. Monica, then convinced Augustine to remain chaste for two years, that is, until the girl reached marriageable age. But his sexual passions prevented him from keeping his part of the bargain. Not long after sending away the mother of Adeodatus, he took another mistress. “I thought it should be too miserable,” he lamented, “unless folded in female arms.” As he came to accept the truth of Christ, one great obstacle that deterred him from fully embracing Christianity was his sexual proclivity. Epitomizing this inner turmoil was his confused prayer, “Give me chastity… but not yet.” It took Augustine many years to understand that his desires could never be fulfilled apart from God but only through God. His final conversion moment came when he came to realize that his heart would be restless until it rested in God.

Chastity is the virtue that helps us to understand that our desires will never be satisfied apart from God. Every sin we commit can be traced to some desire of our heart that became disordered when we thought something other than God could satisfy the desire. We need to learn to pay more attention to our desires and examine whether the actions we are taking help to satisfy our desires or lead to more restlessness. We will always be restless until we realize that only God can satisfy those inmost desires of our hearts. What are the ways that God is desiring to satisfy the longings of your heart if you will only go to God?

For your prayer

St. Augustine would have prayed with John 16:16-20. Use your imagination as you read John 16:16-20. Please reflect on how we go to things apart from God that we think will bring us joy but only ends up bringing grief. Reflect on how God desires to transform your grief into joy if you will only seek to bring your desires to God in prayer.