

**Visit to the Faculty of Theology at Saint Augustine's Seminary,
Toronto: Homily for Solemn Vespers of Saint Augustine (27
August, 17.00)**

Comments from the Faculty: "The same guests will be present for Solemn Vespers at which we would be happy if Archbishop Polvani could preach," i.e. "approximately 180 persons...: bishops, professors, staff, students, board members and invited ecumenical guests."

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers,
Civil Authorities, Students,
Brothers and Sisters,

Saint Augustine, the holy Patron of this Faculty, points out a putative contradiction between the work of teaching and the action of the Holy Spirit. The *Doctor Gratiae* was commenting the First Letter of Saint John: "as for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you, so that you do not need anyone to teach you. But his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and not false; just as it taught you, remain in him."¹

Of course, the great Augustine was well aware of the irony here: he himself says this in the context of a homily, and he immediately follows by asking his congregation: "then to what purpose is it that we... teach you? If His anointing teaches you concerning all things, it seems we labour without a cause."² He even boldly addresses, in his typical rhetorical style, the question to Saint John himself: "you have said, His anointing teaches you concerning all things. To what purpose have you written an Epistle like this?"—that is, shouldn't God's anointing have taught us without the need for preaching or teaching?³

Today, we have to take the Bishop of Hippo very seriously, These were not theoretical question for Augustine. And they should not be for us either.

¹ 1 John 2:27.

² Augustine, *Tractatus 3 in epistolam Ioannis* 13.

³ Ibid.

You will recall that Pope Leo XIV included in his coat of arms a book, as a symbol of Saint Augustine, reminding us that Augustine was deeply formed by his life as a student and a teacher. But he also knew that much of what he had studied before his baptism had not led him to the Truth and Beauty for which he hungered.⁴

In his homily, the great Augustine resolves this difficulty by calling to mind the many agricultural parables that our Lord used in His preaching. Augustine suggests that a teacher can be compared to a gardener: just as the gardener prepares the ground and waters the plant but cannot force the plant to grow, so the teacher can help the student to open his or her mind to God, but cannot force him or her to be taught by the Holy Spirit.

Why is this? Saint Thomas Aquinas reminds us that while biology studies physical life and geometry studies idealized figures, theology studies *God himself*.⁵ Giving this “wisdom from above” is, of course, beyond the capacity of any merely human teacher.⁶ Only God can make Himself accessible to our minds. Nonetheless, our minds are often clouded by our limits: misleading ideas, lack of appropriate concepts with which to understand more deeply our encounter with God.⁷

Teachers can assist us here, by correcting error, training in study, and imparting knowledge. This, in fact, is how God has chosen to reveal Himself. We see that from the very beginning of the human race, God forms us not to be alone but to be a people. Pope Leo XIV reminds us of this with his motto: “in Illo Uno unum”, “in Him who is One, we are one.” God chooses to form our minds through our interactions with each other, in the classroom, at the dinner table, serving the poor, and wherever else He leads us.

This is the essential aspect of an Ecclesiastical Faculty of Theology: to live as a Christian community, sharing with one another that knowledge that is within the grasp of reason in order to open minds to the mystery of God Himself. May God bless this theological Faculty of St. Augustine, in which all “may be one, in the One”.

⁴ Cf. Office of Readings, second reading (*Confessions*).

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, ST I.1.7.

⁶ Vespers, reading (James).

⁷ Lauds, reading (Wisdom).