

**Evening Prayer with Final Vows for Br. Michael, Renewal of Temporary
Vows for Br. Joseph, and Investiture for Brs. Cody and Thomas
of the Canons Regular of St. Thomas Aquinas**

**August 28th, 2021
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, IL**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear Reverend Fathers and beloved Brothers of the Canons Regular of St. Thomas Aquinas: It is no coincidence that our liturgy this evening falls on the feast of St. Augustine, confessor and bishop. Tonight we celebrate his feast day along with our commemoration of the 14th Sunday after Pentecost. Framed between the psalms of vespers and our daily rejoicing with Mary in chanting her *Magnificat*, tonight each of you will take a further step in your religious commitment to Our Lord as Canons Regular of St. Thomas Aquinas. It brings such joy to my heart to celebrate this liturgy with you tonight, and to see established more firmly in our diocese an order of men dedicated to the contemplative life as canons following the Rule of St. Augustine. Surely, more than ever, we need witnesses to the priority of

Christ, and total surrender to Him, as He gave Himself totally to the Father upon the cross.¹

My meditation tonight, and my encouragement to you, will center upon the Collect that the Church provides for us on this feast of St. Augustine. I could have chosen any of the beautiful prayers, or symbolic rites, that the Church in her providence has entrusted to us this evening. Yet it seemed to me that this one small prayer, which the Church has prayed for so many centuries on the feast of St. Augustine speaks to us uniquely and powerfully within tonight's particular context and celebration. It also allows me to return to many happy years of studying Latin and to delight in the nobility and power packed into its tight phrases.

It begins, "*Adesto supplicati6nibus nostris, omnipotens Deus.*" A quick translation would be: "*Give ear to our prayers, O Almighty God,*" and yet the Church's wisdom and love cannot be whittled down to such an easy phrase. *Adesto* comes from *ad* - a preposition meaning "to," but in a dynamic and active sense - combined with the 3rd person imperative of *sum* - *esto* - thus meaning "*He [God] shall be.*" We cannot quite pack all of those details into

¹ Cf. Canons Regular of St. Thomas Aquinas, Overview and Biographies.

one word, but we find that this most simple word, beginning so many of our supplications, begs God to *be for us*, to *come to us*, to *turn towards us* and hear our prayer. Just to remain with this truth for a moment longer: one of St. Augustine's most famous lines is from the very first paragraph of his *Confessions*. "*Tu excitas, ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.*"² In English: "*You stir man to take pleasure in praising you because **you have made us for yourself** and our heart is restless until it rests in you.*" At the center of this line, Augustine uses "*ad*," not "*pro*" – "*quia fecisti nos ad te*" – We are not created just "*for*" God, but "*towards*" God. Our hearts are crafted like His, meant for union with Him, designed to contemplate and delight in Him, to move towards Him, just as He first moves toward us. To love Him, as He loves us first. My brothers, let this truth constantly inform your faithfulness!

Brothers Cody and Thomas, today you receive your habit, and to each of you my brothers, I want to remind you: Let this humble, sacred, vesture be a daily reminder that you have been created *for God*, towards Him, nothing else, nothing here in this world. (All that from the first word of this beautiful prayer!

² Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1, Chapter 1.

Don't worry, I will not meditate tonight on every word, even if that would bring me great joy!)

Moving ahead in our prayer we come to: *"et, quibus fiduciam sperandæ pietatis indulges, intercedente beáto Augustíno, Confessóre Tuo atque Pontífice."*

Here, first casting ourselves boldly upon the generosity of God, we then call upon the intercession of Augustine, God's confessor as well as Bishop. How the good Doctor of Grace must laugh as we invoke him under such titles!

My brothers, Augustine's rule, which you each embrace again this evening to protect your contemplative life, he desired to live for himself. How often he spoke on the burdens of the episcopacy and his thwarted desire to be a simple monk living in contemplation and community! In heaven, he now enjoys his long-desired contemplative life, but his words on this struggle in the world brings us to an important teaching that he gives all of us: *"For you I am a bishop, with you, I am a Christian."* Important to our understanding of this line from his preaching comes as we recall his entire line of thought: *"Where I am terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you. For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian. The*

first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace; that one means danger, this one salvation.”³

All of us, in following the Lord’s call, will find ourselves in danger, but also protected by grace. Br. Michael, you in a special way tonight will be entrusted with the rule of St. Augustine. He was called away from a contemplative living of this rule to be a bishop, but don’t fall into the trap of thinking that in contemplation you will never face dangers. Carrying the prayers and needs of this diocese, and the world, to Our Lord, is a heavy, if beautiful, burden! The Evil One attacks each of us at the heart of our vocation. My *hope, trust, and piety*, and yours, too, as Augustine reminds us, must constantly be placed in Christ, our Salvation.

This brings us to the request made of God in this collect. Even a quick glance shows us the boldness with which the Church approaches Almighty God! “*Consuetæ misericordiæ tribue benignus effectum.*” With these words we stand with the prayers of God’s people down through the ages – Abraham’s servant as he prays to find Rachel; Jacob as he approaches his encounter with Esau; Moses as the people are stiff-necked again; David after Bathsheba; and

³ Augustine, Sermon 340.

Our Lord as He hangs upon the cross – and we remind God that He is merciful. “*Graciously grant the effect of Thine accustomed mercy*” we might translate, though this falls far short once again! “*Consuetae*”, the past participle of *consuescere*, draws on “*con,*” “*su,*” and “*escere*” to refer to God as *the One, who within Himself is merciful*. It is not just *customary* or *habitual* for God to show mercy, but we place before Him, in love and wonder, His own identity that He has revealed to us: “*God is love,*”⁴ and “*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*”⁵ And here, as we approach the mystery of God’s love, we also approach perhaps the most famous words Augustine ever wrote: “*Late have I **loved** you, O Beauty so old and so new: late have I **loved** you! And look! You were within me, and I was outside myself: and it was there that I searched for you. In my **unloveliness** I plunged into the **lovely** things which you created: you were with me, but I was not with you. Those created things kept me far away from you: yet if they had not been in you, they would have not been at all. You called and shouted: and broke through my deafness. You flamed and shone: and banished my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me: and I drew in my breath and I pant for you. I have tasted you: and now I hunger and thirst for more. You*

⁴ 1 John 4:8

⁵ Luke 6:36.

have touched me: and I have burned for your peace."⁶ The Church packs into this one request for God's mercy this truth that Augustine has so eloquently sung: all of our lives are, and must be, a continual longing to be brought more and more into God's love.

My brothers, as you lay down your lives tonight as canons and contemplatives, my prayer for you – *the Church's prayer* for you – through Christ our Lord, is that you might be *renewed in your yearning for God's love*. St. Augustine sought that love his entire life, and every vocation – yours especially – is to give yourself entirely to the delights of that search, and realize that God seeks each of you with an even greater fervor.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, Chapter 27, Paragraph 38 (Translation of Carolyn Hammond, 2016).