

# ST. AUGUSTINE'S PRAYERFUL READING OF THE PSALMS

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*No greater gift could God have given to men than in making His Word, by which He created all things, their Head, and joining them to Him as His members: that the Son of God might become also the Son of man, one God with the Father, one Man with men; so that when we speak to God in prayer for mercy, we do not separate the Son from Him; and when the Body of the Son prays, it separates not its Head from itself: and it is one Saviour of His Body, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who both prays for us, and prays in us, and is prayed to by us. He prays for us, as our Priest; He prays in us, as our Head; He is prayed to by us, as our God. Let us therefore recognise in Him our words, and His words in us.<sup>1</sup>*

St Augustine of Hippo

In St. Augustine's prayerful reading of the Psalms, a reading which is often itself a prayer, there are several themes which are simultaneously influencing and contributing to his manner of exposition. Augustine's treatment of prayer in his interpretation of the Psalms is shaped by his understanding of the intention of the Psalms; it is shaped by his formation in the philosophical milieu of his day, most especially the Neo-Platonic writings of Plotinus and his contemporaries; and, finally, it is expressive of Augustine's own style of exegesis: a manner of approaching the Psalms which is both very much in the Patristic tradition of Scriptural interpretation

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 86; (ed. A. Cleveland Coxe) (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol 8; Hendrickson Publishers; Peabody, Massachusetts 1994) 410

which views the entirety of the Old Testament as speaking directly to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

If the mystical Christ has really been living since the beginning of the human race, then the Old Testament and the Psalms in particular, can be nothing else but the first phase of His revelation, still veiled under carnal types which point forward to the future.<sup>2</sup>

With regards to the understanding of the text of the Psalms themselves which Augustine possessed it must be remembered that his knowledge of Greek was limited and that he did not have a command of Hebrew at all: "Nevertheless, as an exegete there was an irremediable gap in Augustine's knowledge: his almost total ignorance of Hebrew..."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, his description of the meanings of certain passages or verses are often distortions or misunderstandings of the actual meaning of the text. In addition, the Latin text of the Psalms was itself a confusing and frequently inaccurate rendering of the Greek translation of the Hebrew which further contributed to the way in which Augustine read and interpreted the meaning of the Psalms.

The bad Latin text of the Psalms which confronted Augustine undoubtedly lent itself to somewhat arbitrary interpretations. The titles of the Psalms especially, which for the most part result from a complete misunderstanding of the Hebrew, gave rise to elucidations that may nowadays appear fantastic.<sup>4</sup>

Augustine's familiarity with, and competence in, the philosophical arguments

2 Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, (trans. Dame Scholastica Hebgin and Dame Felicitas Corrigan), *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, Vol I, *Psalms 1-29*. (Ancient Christian writers, No.29; The Newman Press; Westminster, Maryland 1960) 11.

3 Ibid., 13

4 Ibid., 12

of his day strongly influence his reading and exposition of the Psalms. His view of the philosophical endeavour, as a highly personal search for the knowledge and wisdom which reside in God and are revealed in Christ, is one which is strongly complemented by the highly personalistic, emotive and qualitatively oral nature of the Psalms themselves. Augustine's commentaries on the Psalms "have the freedom, the forcefulness, and the penetrating simplicity of the spoken word"<sup>5</sup> and this dimension of his exposition of the Psalms lends itself in a profoundly prayerful way to his exposition of the meaning and significance of the Psalms. That is, Augustine's way of reading the Psalms is simultaneously his way of praying the Psalms. His commentary on the meaning of the Psalms is not separate from his spiritual reflection and interaction with their meaning. As well, the Neo-Platonic *Weltanschauung* of Augustine is evident in his reading of the Psalms. The Neo-Platonic themes of certitude, interior illumination, and the superiority of the spiritual to the material are all stressed by Augustine in his explanation of the Psalms.

Finally, and most importantly, for Augustine the Psalms are an emphatically and distinctly powerful personal revelation of Jesus Christ. In them it is Christ who speaks, or who is spoken of, or is spoken to by members of his Body, the Church.

The Psalms... actually become the Book of Hours of the Mystical Christ, whom we hear praying to God now as Head, now as Body- or at times we even overhear a mysterious dialogue between the two... the whole theme of the *Enarrationes in psalmos*... is controlled and ordered by the consciousness of the whole Christ as He thinks, prays, works, and suffers.<sup>6</sup>

This perspective brings to Augustine's understanding of the Psalms an urgency and a dynamism. Faced with the various heretical movements which so threatened the Church, the expositions on the Psalms: "The Lord mighty in battle. Handle His

5 Ibid., 5.

6 Ibid., 10. Thomas Merton eloquently echoes this in his own reflections on the Psalms: "The Psalms are the Songs of this City of God. They are therefore the voice of the Mystical Body of Christ. They are the Songs of Christ," *Bread in the Wilderness*, (The Liturgical Press; Collegeville, Minnesota 1971) 35.

scars: you will find them healed, and human frailty restored to immortality.”<sup>7</sup> One can certainly feel the confidence in a hard-won battle that the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, has waged with the Manicheans, the Donatists, and the Pelagians in which Augustine has been both a witness and a combatant. The Psalms speak to Augustine of the Mind and Body of Christ and that means that they speak of the experience of the Church as well. As he writes in his second discourse on Psalm 29:

Possibly the voice which speaks is not that of our Lord Jesus Christ, but that of mankind itself, of the whole Church, of the entire Christian people, because in Christ all men form but a single man, and all Christians unite to form but one man. Possibly it is this man, this unity of Christendom that says: “I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast upheld me and hast not made my enemies to rejoice over me.”<sup>8</sup>

The Psalms, then, possess a richness and a complexity which speaks to Augustine on many levels: they are a herald of the coming Christ; they contain the words of Christ himself; and they express a continuing dialogue between him and his Body, the Church, which is praying and reflecting in the Psalms as well as on the Psalms: “...we are able to learn and enter into the mind of the Church, as we listen to what is as it were her inward voice, reflecting on her own life.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as Augustine continues his exposition of Psalm 29 he observes of the Psalm’s title, “Unto the end, a Psalm of a canticle at the dedication of the house, for David himself,” that it speaks of “this house which is the Church” and that this Psalm, which considers the suffering and injustice experienced by the righteous, is the Church’s own experience: the house of the Church is under construction, it is under the powers of this world, but it is to be one day dedicated and on that day, at that dedication, “the splendor of the Christian people, as yet invisible, will burst forth in glory.”<sup>10</sup> Augustine begins his exposition of the Psalms as a prayer: he is a member of a

7 Augustine, “Discourse on Psalm 23”, verse 8; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 298

8 Augustine, “Second Discourse on Psalm 29”, verse 5; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 298.

9 Hebgin and Corrigan, 10.

10 Augustine, “Second Discourse on Psalm 29”, verse 5; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 10.

praying Church which looks to the Psalms as their own story, as their own voice, and in the Psalms listen to the words of Christ which are their words also.

Augustine brings to the Psalms a committed and dynamic faith in Christ; a very personal view of the pursuit and apprehension of wisdom; and a deep and textured literary analysis of the meeting and purpose of the Psalms, which he is reading always at four levels: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical. All of these factors give his exposition of the Psalms a uniquely 'catholic' focus in that their appeal is simultaneously universal and encompassing and particular and unifying. With that in mind, let us approach the Psalms themselves. I propose to look at several Psalms briefly, exploring the many dimensions of exegesis, and frequently eisegesis, that Augustine utilizes in his commentaries on the meaning of the Psalms.

### *Psalm 3*

In this Psalm Augustine hears the voice of Christ as he considers the sufferings which he must undergo and we listen with Augustine as Christ speaks:

“But thou, O Lord, takest me up.” Christ speaks to God in His human nature, since God's taking of human nature is the Word made flesh. “My glory.” He even calls God His glory, this Man whom the Word of God has so taken upon Himself that God and He are One... Here, I think, is denoted Christ's human mind, not without reason termed the head of the soul; and this soul was so united, so inextricably part of the surpassing excellency of the Word Incarnate, as it were, that it was not surrendered even in the deep humiliation of the passion.<sup>11</sup>

The theme of Christ praying in the Psalms to his Father is a strong one for

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, “Discourse on Psalm 3”, verse 4; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 32.

Augustine because it offers many lessons to the Church as the Church prays the Psalms. Christ continues to pray in the Psalms as the Church, his mystical Body, prays the Psalms. The unity of the Son to the Father does not mean that Christ did not need to pray. On the contrary, as the interpretation of Augustine suggests, that unity was an expression of their closeness and it continued to deepen and develop through prayer. Christ speaks, "I have cried to the Lord with my voice,"<sup>12</sup> and his Father answers, "And He hath heard me from His holy mount."<sup>13</sup> How is this relationship of prayer to be understood? For Augustine this intimacy between Father and Son is an interior disposition of the heart: "I have cried to the Lord with my voice: not with the physical voice which produces sound by vibration of the air, but with the voice of the heart, which man cannot hear but which rings out to God like a cry."<sup>14</sup> This interior voice of prayer is the prayer of Susanna, and it is the prayer of Christ, who instructed his disciples to pray behind closed doors; an instruction which Augustine understands to mean "noiselessly in the secret place of the heart."<sup>15</sup> This is the way of prayer which brings man close to God and to which God listens most attentively.

Let no one be too ready to say that there is not much prayer in such a voice because not a single audible word escapes from our lips, since in silent prayer of the heart as long as any distractions interfere with the fervour of our petition we cannot claim: "I have cried to the Lord with my voice." We are only entitled to say this with truth when the soul, withdrawn in solitude from everything physical and from all earthly considerations, speaks in prayer to the Lord where He alone hears. Such prayer is termed a cry by reason of its burning intensity.<sup>16</sup>

12 Augustine, "Discourse on Psalm 3", verse 5; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 32.

13 Ibid.; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 33.

14 Ibid.; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 32.

15 Ibid.; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 33.

16 Ibid.

*Psalm 14*

Augustine begins his exposition of this Psalm by taking the word “tabernacle” as “tent” in order to develop the theme of battle for “at present indeed we are warring against the devil”<sup>17</sup> and to anticipate the ultimate victory of Christ, and in him, the Church, over the many foes of the Church. As soldiers, “tent fellows,”<sup>18</sup> in this battle we are called upon to manifest the virtues of Christian life in our deeds and in our hearts. For who shall be worthy to sojourn in the tabernacle of the Lord? “He that speaketh truth in his heart.”<sup>19</sup> It is at this point that Augustine elaborates the need for an interior, rather than an exterior, commitment to Christian faith: “Speaking the truth matters little, therefore, unless our words correspond with our hearts as well.”<sup>20</sup> Augustine will repeatedly return to this point; that the way to God moves from exterior to interior, and thus, from inferior to superior. The importance of the interior dimension to reason and to faith is central to Augustine’s understanding of understanding: “Return within yourself. Truth dwells in the inward man.”<sup>21</sup>

The resolution of this Christian virtue is the reception of a “great and unshakable security”<sup>22</sup> which calls to mind the “eternal, immutable beauty”<sup>23</sup> of God. The virtuous Christian “shall not be moved forever”<sup>24</sup> and is, therefore, in this way like God who is immutable, eternal and unchanging. It is of interest to note that this direction of thought is quite similar to Aristotle’s discussion of the mind in *De Anima* where he writes, “By mind I mean that whereby the soul thinks and judges.”<sup>25</sup> Aristotle describes the mind as impassible, unmixed, immortal and eternal, which are very much the terms he uses to describe the nature of God. Recall, also,

17 Augustine, “Discourse on Psalm 14”, verse 1; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 157.

18 Ibid.

19 Psalm 14, 3.

20 Augustine, “Discourse on Psalm 14,” verse 3; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 158.

21 Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, XXXIX. 72.

22 Augustine, “Discourse on Psalm 14”, verse 5; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 158.

23 Augustine, “Discourse on Psalm 14”, verse 4; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 158.

24 Psalm 14,5.

25 Aristotle, *De Anima*, III.4; in Richard McKeon, (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (Random House; New York 1941) 590.

Augustine's description of Christ's human mind, "not without reason termed the head of the soul," and how it was united with God.<sup>26</sup> Here Augustine demonstrates his learning in philosophy in a way which beautifully completes and enriches his faith.

### *Psalm 18*

This Psalm is treated by Augustine in two discourses and he finds in the Psalm much which calls to the reader's attention Augustine's indebtedness to the Neo-Platonists, Plotinus in particular. Augustine speaks of the "going out" of the Son from the Father, of the Son's "circuit even to the height of heaven," and the return of the Son to the Father: "And in the fullness of His Godhead He reaches in His course equality with the Father."<sup>27</sup> This sense of descent from the Father (the One) to the earth (the world-soul and matter) and the ascent back to the Father (the One) reveals a Plotinian perspective of ascent and descent which is strengthened by Augustine's reprimand of those who are stubbornly deaf to the word of God: "Would you quarrel to retain a fragment, when peace could put you in possession of the whole?"<sup>28</sup> This is a concern of Augustine's in his *Confessions*, wherein he writes of the importance of continence for appreciating God's wisdom: "By continence we are collected together and brought to the unity from which we disintegrate into multiplicity."<sup>29</sup> Here is presented, in an unique way, the Plotinian concern with unity and multiplicity which Augustine is cognizant of in an entirely Christian way; that the Church is one, even though it is made up of many, and the knowledge of God (the One) cannot be sacrificed by a quarreling over fragments (the many; different tensions; the many different heresies). It must be with one voice and with an undivided heart that the Church prays.

Augustine repeats several times in this Psalm a concern with cleanliness, with a state of purity and refinement which is unspotted and immaculate.<sup>30</sup> This concern

26 Augustine, "Discourse on Psalm 3", verse 4; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 32.

27 Augustine, "First Discourse on Psalm 18", verse 7; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 178.

28 Augustine, "Second Discourse on Psalm 18", verse 5; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 188.

29 Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xxix.40; in Henry Chadwick, (trans.) *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford University Press Oxford), 202. See also note 26, page 202.

30 Augustine, "First Discourse on Psalm 18", verse 8; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 178.



is further explored in his discussion of sin: "... then I shall be without spot, and I shall be cleansed from the great sin."<sup>31</sup> "That great sin" is pride; to the Greek, *hubris*, and it may be that Augustine has that sense of over-reaching, of wanting to be like God, in mind. Earlier in his discourse on Psalm 3, he took the words of Christ's prayer to the Father, when Christ calls his Father "My glory" even though Christ is himself One with the Father: let this, Augustine writes, be "A lesson for the proud, who close their ears when asked" "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"<sup>32</sup> One recalls the hymn of Philippians: "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though he was by nature God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself."<sup>33</sup>

This concern, however, with cleanliness and purity is a further reflection of the Neo-Platonic ideal of the higher, more spiritual, dimensions of existence; that these dimensions are possessed of a purity and refinement that the lower, more material, aspects of existence lack. Augustine, familiar with, and originally a member of, Manicheism, is here using that dichotomy between spirit and matter to contrast Christ, "the immaculate law,"<sup>34</sup> with our sinful, 'spotted,' natures. In this Manichaean vein Augustine continues in his second discourse to place in juxtaposition spirit and flesh, light and darkness, day and night; identify Jesus and the Apostles with the former and Judas and the devil with the latter. Augustine offers a reading of "Day unto day uttereth the word, and night unto night proclaimeth knowledge"<sup>35</sup> as indicating "spirit to spirit, flesh to flesh... spiritual matters to the spiritually-minded, earthly matters to the earthly-minded."<sup>36</sup>

This theme of interiority in focus is related to the word of God by Augustine in his exposition of the ninth verse of this Psalm: "The commandment of the Lord is lightsome, enlightening the eyes. This clear commandment undimmed by the veil of corporal observances is the enlightenment of a man's interior sight."<sup>37</sup> In these few words are to be found an eloquent summary of Augustine's philosophical and

31 Psalm 18, 14.

32 Augustine, "Discourse on Psalm 3", verse 4; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 32.

34 Augustine, "First Discourse on Psalm 18", verse 8; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 178.

35 Psalm 18, 3.

36 Augustine, "Second Discourse on Psalm 18", verse 3; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 187.

37 Augustine, "First Discourse on Psalm 18", verse 9; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 179.

religious experience: the Neo-Platonic emphasis on interiority and enlightenment; the Manichaean emphasis that the interior light surpasses and transcends the dimness of the veil of any corporality; the surviving resistance of Jewish converts or Jewish-thinking converts to surrender their faith in the exterior, corporal observances of the commandments of the Lord; and Augustine's own personal emphasis on the interiority of the religious experience and the illumination of the Lord through grace of mind: through "the enlightenment of a man's interior sight." A fascinating verse and treatment, really, and indicative of the space and the complexity of both Augustine's character and intellect.

In his exposition of the eleventh verse, Augustine brings together both a Scriptural and a Neo-Platonic reading in order to explain the meaning of the Psalm: "The judgements of the Lord are true, justified in themselves... More to be desired than gold and precious stone."<sup>38</sup> Here, again, is the juxtaposition of the material and the spiritual which calls to mind Jesus' admonition against storing up treasures on earth: "Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth, where rust and moth consume, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourself treasures in heaven, where neither rust nor moth consumes, nor thieves break and steal. For where thy treasure is, there also will thy heart be."<sup>39</sup> In his exposition, however, Augustine's thoughts also recall the Plotinian teaching on the fragmentation and disintegration of matter. When Augustine goes on to describe the judgments of the Lord as "true with an immutable justice"<sup>40</sup> such description suggests a Greek idea, namely that articulated by Aristotle, that God is unappealable, unalterable, immutable, and true in himself; that God is unmoved and unapproachable in the self-contained truth of himself: "The judgements of the Lord are true, justified in themselves." In the words of Jesus before the Pharisees, one finds a startling echo of this: "It is I who bear witness to myself"<sup>41</sup> and it is, perhaps, this echo which Augustine wanted his audience to hear.

38 Psalm 18, 9-10.

39 Matthew 6, 19-21.

40 Augustine, "First Discourse on Psalm 18", verse 10; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 179. Cf John 5, 30.

41 John 8, 18.

*Psalm 21*

Augustine boldly proclaims at the beginning of his sermon on this Psalm that "The whole Psalm is spoken in the Person of our crucified Lord."<sup>42</sup> It is Christ himself who speaks to the Church indeed, to the whole world in this Psalm and in his second discourse on the Psalm Augustine brings that universality to an anguished and particular concern:

I wonder, brethren, whether this Psalm is being read today among the Donatists? I ask you, my brethren, I confess to you, Christ's mercy is my witness: are they made of stone so that they cannot hear? What could be said more clearly even to the deaf?<sup>43</sup>

Augustine, standing as a bishop, shepherd's crook in his hand, shows real emotion here: speaking both personally and episcopally, he cries out for the lost sheep of the flock of Christ.

Augustine shows great flair in his first discourse on this Psalm by using an elaborate metaphorical reading to bring the crucifixion of the Body of Christ to the consciousness of the Body of the Church. For example, Augustine explains the fifteenth verse, "I was poured out like water, and all my bones were scattered,"<sup>44</sup> as the abandonment of Christ by the disciples: "...and my disciples, who formed the framework of my Body, the Church, left me, scattered by fear."<sup>45</sup>

His entire reading of the tenth verse, "For Thou art He who hast drawn me out of the womb and soothed me from the breasts of my mother,"<sup>46</sup> is metaphorical. Jesus has been drawn out by God from the womb of the Jewish race, "that womb which still envelops in darkness as those unborn as yet to the light of Christ, who

42 Augustine, "First Discourse on Psalm 21", verse 1; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 200.

43 Augustine, "Second Discourse on Psalm 21", verse 3; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 209.

44 Psalm 21, 15.

45 Augustine, "First Discourse on Psalm 21", verse 15; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 203.

46 Psalm 21, 10.

place their salvation in exterior observances<sup>47</sup> and Jesus has been fed at the Virgin's breast, and not from the "breast of the synagogue."<sup>48</sup> In this reading Augustine is not so much castigating the Jews as he is decrying the exterior observances of the Christian life which are not motivated by an interior illumination. Augustine rejects the Jewish tendencies of those Christians "being fed on formal observances"<sup>49</sup> who ignore the necessary interior commitment to God. The Church, for Augustine, prays from the inside out.

Interestingly, in the second discourse on this Psalm, Augustine considers the Greek notion of the circularity of time, and rejects it because the meaning of the Easter passion of Christ cannot be repeated; it is *the* singular event of human history:

Our Lord's passion, as we know, happened but once; Christ died once... Yet, for fear we should forget what occurred but once, it is re-enacted every year for us to remember. Does Christ die as often as the celebration of Easter comes round? No...<sup>50</sup>

This is now a new time: a time of *kairos* which has intersected that time which is *chronos* and which has forever changed time. It is theme which Augustine will develop at length in *The City of God*.

### ***Psalm 22***

In this Psalm, Augustine hears, not Christ speaking, but "the Church who addresses Christ."<sup>51</sup> From this opening perspective, Augustine reads the Psalm entirely metaphorically. The Good Shepherd is understood to be Christ, who "dwellest by faith in my heart."<sup>52</sup> Here is simply stated the repeated theme in

47 Augustine, "First Discourse on Psalm 21", verse 10; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 202.

48 Ibid.; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 203.

49 Ibid.

50 Augustine, "Second Discourse on Psalm 21"; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 207.

51 Augustine, "Discourse on Psalm 22", verse 1; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 228.

52 Augustine, "Discourse on Psalm 22", verse 4; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 229. Cf. John 10, 11.

Augustine's reflections on the Psalms of the emphasis on interiority and personal guidance by the active, inward, presence of God. Augustine, then, does not understand the material images of the Psalm, the place of pasture, the water of refreshment, and the oil of anointing, as pleasant allegories, but, rather, understands them as metaphorical realities: the shepherd who brings the sheep to a place of pasture is Christ, who "has lead me to faith,"<sup>53</sup> the sheep which have been led to refreshing water are guided by Christ, the good shepherd, who "has brought me up on the water of baptism."<sup>54</sup> and the anointing of the head with oil is, for Augustine, the gladdening of his soul "with spiritual joy."<sup>55</sup> In this manner of exposition, Augustine draws his audience from the lower to the higher; from the material to the spiritual; and from the individual reading to the catholic understanding. This is quite important: indeed, it is essential to note, that even as Augustine demonstrates repeatedly a concern with interiority and personal growth in God, it is never at the expense of the unity and exteriority of that expression through the Church. How is interiority in prayer to be recognized? By its exterior manifestation. This entire Psalm is sacramental and the sacraments are the exterior prayer of the Church. The Church addresses this Psalm to Christ, not as a myriad of broken fragments, but as a whole: a whole body which is animated by one spirit, in which beats one heart, and which speaks with one voice: "Possibly the voice which speaks... is that of mankind itself, of the whole Church, of the entire Christian people, because in Christ all men form but a single man, and all Christians unite to form but one man."<sup>56</sup>

### *Psalm 29*

Augustine asks his audience whose voice we hear in this Psalm and he goes on to say that it is Christ who is speaking. More than speaking, though, because he is praying; praying "in excess of joy"<sup>57</sup> and his voice is raised in praise and thanksgiving. Augustine then offers a powerfully moving view of the weakness of

53 Augustine, "Discourse on Psalm 22", verse 2; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 229.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Augustine, "Second Discourse on Psalm 29", verse 5; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 298.

57 Augustine, "Second Discourse on Psalm 29", verse 1; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 292.

Christ as a human person praying, as we pray, in our weakness, in our joy, to the Father:

Let us consider in the first place that it is our Lord Himself, who in the human nature which He has deigned to assume has every right to make these prophetic words of the Psalmist His own. As man, He was weak; as weak man, He prayed.<sup>58</sup>

To whom, Augustine asks, does Christ, the Son of God, pray? How, in weakness, can Christ pray to God? It is because Christ prays in our weakness that he prays to the Father. He is the "Mediator between God and men"<sup>59</sup> and it is in this capacity that Christ prays, sharing with us our weakness and humility before the Father. And yet, this weakness is a source of joy because from it emerges Christ's praise of the Father, "I will extol thee, O Lord,"<sup>60</sup> which is our praise also. There is a beautiful reading back and forth here; a manner of exposition which contemporary Scriptural exegetes would strongly condemn and swiftly dismiss, but which, in Augustine's prayerful reading of the Psalms, is both natural and appropriate. As Augustine declares of our relationship to Christ:

He is prayed to in the form of God, in the form of a servant He prayeth; there the Creator, here created; assuming unchanged the creature, that it might be changed, and making us with Himself one Man, Head and Body. Therefore we pray to Him, through Him, in Him; and we speak in Him, He speaks in us the prayer of this Psalm... Let no one then, when he hears these words, say, Christ speaketh not; nor again say, I speak not; nay rather, if he own himself to be in the body, let him say

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 293.

60 Ibid.; in Hebgin and Corrigan, 292.

both, Christ speaks, and I speak. Be  
 thou unwilling to say anything without  
 Him, and He saith nothing without thee...<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, this is how Augustine understands the teaching of Jesus on prayer; this is the manner in which he taught the apostles to pray, drawing from the Scriptures examples for them to learn from and illuminating the difficult passages by the light of his own example and this example of instruction is continued in the Church: "What of the Apostles themselves?... That ye may perceive it at once, they learnt to pray what we pray: to them was given the pattern of prayer by the heavenly Counsellor."<sup>62</sup> The way in which the Lord's Prayer was taught was the way in which the Apostles taught and that teaching continues: "they learnt to pray what we pray." There is a wonderful sense of the continuity of the tradition of prayer in the Church expressed in this passage. As Christ looked to the Psalms in order to pray as a man, so we look to the Psalms in order to pray as a man, so we look to the Psalms so that we might pray as "One Man, Head and Body" to Christ, through Christ, and in Christ.

The importance of prayer in Augustine's reading of the Psalms is not always explicit until one remembers that the Psalms themselves are prayers! Augustine's entire enterprise of interpretation and exposition of the Psalms and their meaning is an enterprise of prayer. In the Psalms, the many voices of prayer are raised in praise, in thanksgiving, in dialogue, and in instruction. In each voice, whether it is Augustine's, the Church's, Christ's, or our own, we hear always of the need to pray: "For it is thy heart's desire that is thy prayer; and if thy desire continues uninterrupted, thy prayer continueth also."<sup>63</sup> Our heart's desire is the love of God - *Tu nos fecisti ad te et cor nostrum inquietum est donec requiescat in te* - and that love, that rest in God, is realized in prayer

61 Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 86; in Coxe, 410.

62 Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 143; in Coxe, 652.

63 Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 38; in Coxe, 107.