

Many years ago I learned a great piece of wisdom from the writings of St. Augustine in his autobiography “Confessions” in which he looked deeply at his own inner journey and saw many of the basic workings and wanderings of the human heart, mind and soul that are still just as insightful today as they were the day he wrote them some 1500 years ago; which is why his autobiography remains a spiritual classic worth the read. Back to the piece of wisdom I found that I want each of us to consider today; St. Augustine wrote speaking to God, “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”

Several truths are touched on in this one sentence. God has made us for Himself. Expounding on this, C.S. Lewis wrote that God is the fuel we are meant to run on. Everything else we try to put in God’s place may work for a time, but the human machine eventually sputters and grinds to a halt causing many of the disappointments, disillusionments and sins that plague human existence. It also makes sense that God gets very perturbed with the religious leaders that take our need for God and use it to manipulate the people to their own purposes. The bad shepherds we hear about in today’s 1st Reading. Rather than helping the people find their true sustenance which is God, they lead them to some other food that is not satisfying and which does not nourish them. The people will wither and be destroyed on this unhealthy diet of garbage.

Another truth in St. Augustine’s spiritual one liner, is that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. There is a certain existential restlessness to human life. It is a restlessness that can never be satisfied once and for all. Some get tired of trying and learn to live with the background anxiety it creates. Others try to sate it with ever new things and experiences with the belief (or hope) that the next new possession, the next unique experience, the next novel learning will be the one that ultimately satisfies. It never does. Many such pursuits are harmless, unless they lead to outrageous debt or to taking greater and greater risks that might get someone hurt or killed. However they all miss the real object the restlessness is meant to draw us toward, God. The religious response is not to just give up or endlessly try some other thing. If the satisfaction for a hunger can’t be found in this life, look beyond this life.

It is in discovering and embracing our need for God and finding the contentment that resting in God brings that we begin to find whatever lasting contentment can be found in this life. Unfortunately, that’s usually far easier said than done. Many if not most young people have too much energy to rest in anything, and besides that, they are also far too interested in exploring this big bright beautiful world of ours. Even those of us who are older can get stuck in our habits and ruts and breaking out of them can be a monumental challenge, especially if part of the rut is chasing the kids or grandkids who are all about exploring the big bright beautiful world. Let’s face it, that has its own upside.

So what do we do if we can't re-track our lives so that we can rest in God more completely? Realize that we have a loving God who understands what we are up against. This is the same God who instead of getting angry at the crowds who ruined his vacation with the apostles, was moved with pity for them, and chose to teach them instead of shooing them away. Also, the next time you're about to buy that next thing, schedule that next vacation or sign up for that next self-improving learning experience because you feel restless and bored, take at least a few minutes to spend with God—quietly, just you and God, and see what that does to those urges to spend or go or do. You may not change your mind, but you may spend or go or do with a different sense of why and a realization someone you didn't realize is going along with you.

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.” Amen