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* Knights of Malta *

Chancellor's Update

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Saint Augustine's The City of God

The following is from a friend and a scholar teaching Latin in a school in Colorado. Here is a section from a recent speech entitled above. (Quotes are from *The City of God* - Entire speech available upon request)

Characteristics of these two cities. "A people," Augustine says, "is an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement," and "in order to discover the character of any people, we have only to observe what they love."²⁰ The two cities "were made by two loves: the earthly city by the love of self unto the contempt of God, and the heavenly city by the love of God unto the contempt of self."²¹ The earthly city is motivated by the glory of domination and rule, the city of God by true glory.²² The earthly city is "founded in the material good of this world," the city of God is founded upon hope in God.²³ The earthly city is often divided against itself with litigations, wars, and quarrels. Its victories are also very short lived. The city of God on the other hand will have never-ending peace and eternal victory.²⁴

In this life, there is a certain amount of beauty, peace, prosperity, health, safety, and advantages, which the good and wicked enjoy together, which we are to pray for, and which is to be attributed to God who grants the sun to shine on the just and the unjust alike. But this beauty and peace is temporal and it is a lower kind of good, not to be loved in preference to God, the eternal and unchangeable good.²⁵

Both cities are "in this present world commingled, and as it were entangled together"²⁶ running "in the course amid mankind."²⁷ "In this fleeting course of time," the city of God "sojourns as a stranger in the midst of the ungodly," but shall one day "dwell in the fixed stability of its eternal seat, which it now with patience waits for."²⁸

The Final End of the Two Cities. In Book 15, Augustine writes that "out of one mass handed over to merited damnation, God made some vessels of wrath to dishonour and other vessels of mercy to honour; in punishment rending to the former what is due, in grace giving the latter what is not due."²⁹ Babylon, the city of man, eventually will be "thrown down with violence," and her smoke will rise "forever and ever." (Rev 18:21; 19:3) For, "the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death." (Rev. 21:8) But the destiny of the city of God is "peace in eternal life,"³⁰ "the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God"³¹ when "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain." (Rev 21:4) When the church militant becomes the church triumphant we "shall enjoy a sound immortality and incorruption, and shall have no more vices... and this condition shall be eternal... But, on the other hand, they who do not belong to this city of God shall inherit eternal misery, which is also called the second death."³²

As you can see Augustine's *City of God* is not utopian, but according to one reviewer it is surely a "book of realistic hope"³³

I would like to focus on three things concerning our citizenship in the city of God. 1) Gaining citizenship in the city of God. 2) Responsibilities of citizenship in the city of God. 3) A benefit of that citizenship.

[Gaining Citizenship in the City of God.](#) Augustine would challenge us today and say, “Which city are you a citizen of? The one that is temporal, out for its own glory, living in contempt of God, and is ultimately judged with eternal punishment? Or the one that is eternal and lives for the glorification of God and in turn is glorified by God for ever and ever?”

Augustine would call on us to call upon the Lord, as Abel did. The highest and complete terrestrial duty of the city of God, he said, is exemplified in Abel who called upon the name of the Lord and trusted in the mercy of God.³⁴ Let’s talk about that mercy. God the Father sent God the Son to become flesh for us. He needed to be man to die and God to save, for who can save but God alone? And the most wonderful transaction in all of human history happened on the cross. The sins of the world were imputed to Him and He took the penalty for it, and then He imputed His righteousness to us who believe. As St. Paul says, “What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn sin in the flesh, that the righteous of the law might be fulfilled in us.” (Rom 8:3-4) And when God remits our sin and acquits us, who can condemn us? Paul continued, saying that Jesus, “who knew no sin” became a sacrifice for sin on our behalf, “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5: 21).

Citizenship in the city of God means paying homage to the founder and governor of that city, the Lord Jesus Christ, the true “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Rev 19:16), whom God the Father gave as head over all things to the Church (Eph 1:22), who gave Him a name above every name” (Phi. 2:9), who committed all judgment to Him in heaven and on earth (John5; 27; Mat 28:18). Augustine calls us to this founder and maker and putting our life in His hands, we are “delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son.” (Col. 1:13). For, he writes, “In this...consists the righteousness of a man, that he submit himself to God, his body to his soul, and his vices...to his reason...and also that he beg from God grace to do his duty, and pardon of his sins, and render to God thanks for all the blessings he receives.”³⁵

[Responsibilities as a Citizen of the City of God.](#) I think Augustine would tell us today that one of our chief responsibilities as a citizen of the city of God is to bring the city of God to our families by being loving, dutiful, and forgiving as husbands and fathers, as wives and mothers, and as children to our parents and teachers. He would say that we ought to strive for harmony in this most basic of human societies. For, in his words, “domestic peace has a relation to civic peace.” And, families need to live in faith and look not for their peace in earthly advantage but seek “the eternal blessings which are promised.”³⁶

[Benefits of Citizenship in the City of God.](#) Finally, Augustine would remind us of a great benefit of citizenship in the city of God, eternal perspective in the face of tragedy. No one is free from suffering in this life. We all have it to one degree or another – death, divorce, problems with children, financial problems. Some of you are facing the empty nest, which is not very pleasant. We have the comfort of Jesus saying, “I know your tribulation and your poverty.” (Rev 2:9).

Augustine would say let God use those sufferings to correct us of our selfishness, our craving for wealth, and our lust of the flesh. Let God use them to restrain our anger, our desire to advance socially, or our relishing of flattery.

And finally, know that these momentary light afflictions are nothing compared to the eternal weight of glory (cf 2 Cor 4:17).

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