

## HAPPINESS AND THE RESTLESS HEART: AN AUGUSTINIAN CONFESSION

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### ABSTRACT

Saint Augustine opens his *Confessions* with the words “Great art thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is thy power, and of thy wisdom there is no number. . . . this tiny part of all that Thou hast created desires to praise Thee. Thou dost so excite him that to praise Thee is his joy. For Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” The author discovered these words, in the translation of Frank Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943), at a young age, and the concluding line in particular, “For Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee,” has occasioned continual return and reflection. In this article, the author investigates the meaning of this line in its context, following the phrase “to praise Thee is his joy.” Adopting a generous construal of his own experience with the text, the author examines some of the ways in which a person who wishes to be a Christian thinks about the elusive yet all-important dimension of human existence called happiness or joy.

**KEYWORDS:** Christianity, Augustine, happiness, faith, idolatry

In 397 CE, ten years after his baptism, Saint Augustine began his *Confessions* by directly addressing the God to whom he had devoted his life, using the words of Psalm 96:4: “Great art thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is thy power, and of thy wisdom there is no number.” He continued, “[T]his tiny part of all that Thou hast created desires to praise Thee. Thou dost so excite him that to praise Thee is his joy. For Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”<sup>1</sup>

I am not sure how Frank Sheed’s sturdy translation of Augustine’s classic reached me when I was fourteen years old—I was in minor seminary then, and I think it was a seminary prefect who handed the book to me for spiritual reading. Nor am I any longer certain, so many years removed from the moment when I first read them, just what in these words so moved me at that stage of my life. Certainly I was not then an auspicious example of happiness or joy, or at least not by any ordinary measure. I was an orphan, I had been transplanted to an alien culture, and I was intensely lonely. I ended up in the seminary mostly because my confused aspirations to holiness (fantasies spurred by reading the lives of saints) were translated by well-meaning teachers into a vocation to the priesthood, and therefore into an adolescence spent in a seminary across Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans taught by Benedictine monks. But at that point, I had no idea what being a priest meant, or that I would, within a

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1 Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. F. J. Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943), 3.

few years, spend a not-inconsiderable portion of my life as one of those monks. What I knew then for certain was that I was among strangers who spoke strangely, that I had no real home to which to return, and that books offered the best company available to me. Perhaps it is all too obvious what moved me in Augustine's words.

In any case, despite my then-limited grasp of Latin, I located and then memorized the last words of the above citation: *Quia fecisti nos ad te domine et inquietum cor nostrum donec requiescat in te* ("For Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee"). Unlike other tags and snippets that I committed to memory in those days of intellectual energy and ambition, this line stuck in my mind, and I found myself over the years returning to it and reciting it to myself on all sorts of occasions. It had clearly become something like a mantra, a statement that spoke to my life directly and consistently, without any necessary reference to its original setting. It was a wisdom that I recognized as addressed to me, and through which I could understand my own existence. Remarkably, though, as I carried this Augustinian line through the years, I did not remember how Augustine himself had connected his praise of God to the experience of joy or happiness: "[T]o praise Thee is his joy" (*ut laudare te delectet*). But there is the distinct possibility that, as I called this text to mind repeatedly over the years, I was, consciously or not, also reminding myself of the basis of true happiness.

In this essay, I adopt that generous construal of my own experience with Augustine's text, and I use it to examine some of the ways in which someone who wishes to be a Christian thinks about the elusive yet all-important dimension of human existence we call happiness—or, more often for Christians, joy. I am no longer a lonely adolescent boy, no longer either a priest or a monk, but a simple Catholic layperson who is also a husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and by some estimations, a scholar and teacher. And, at the age of seventy, I dare to call myself reasonably if not ecstatically happy.

Before parsing Augustine's statement as a guide to one Catholic's conception of true happiness, I must note that Catholic Christianity is heir—as Augustine himself emphatically was—to the classical culture of Greece and Rome, in which philosophers considered happiness among the most serious of philosophical topics and gave it their best attention. Although the philosophers disagreed on many points, such as the relation of happiness to pleasure or to political engagement, they agreed on certain fundamental things. They all agreed that happiness was supremely important and supremely to be desired. They agreed that happiness could not be reduced to something external, momentary, or accidental; happiness, therefore, was not a fine house, or a splendid wedding, or winning a sweepstakes. Instead, they all regarded happiness as an abiding condition specific to the human construction of the self, a consequence of human choice and disposition—not the choice between this thing and that, as in the choice between colors for a carpet, but the habitual choice between good (virtue) and bad (vice). It was a matter of character. In one fashion or another, the pagan philosophers also connected happiness to the divine, for the gods could be called, simply, "the happy ones."

Like the Greek and Roman philosophers before him, Augustine gave serious thought to happiness. Even before his baptism, he wrote *De Beata Vita* ("On the Happy Life"). He agreed with the philosophers that "all persons want to be happy, and no person is happy who does not have what he wants." He agreed that genuine happiness must consist, then, in something that is truly within the grasp of humans ("something that can be had when it is wanted"), rather than something external, temporary, or accidental. He agreed with them, finally, that happiness must derive from the divine.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *De beata vita* 2.10–11.

For Augustine, however, the divine was neither Greco-Roman polytheism (which he regarded as idolatry), nor the philosophically refined and impersonal divine principle that was the best that philosophy could reach through critical refinement of polytheism. Augustine's divine was the living God of the Old and New Testament, the God of Israel, and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. His conception of true happiness was correspondingly shaped by the ways in which the living God revealed himself through the act of creation, through the giving of the law, through the shaping of a people, and above all, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. From the words of Jesus on happiness,<sup>3</sup> Augustine understood that happiness involved meekness, lowliness, and purity of heart. From those same statements, and above all from the experience of the crucified Messiah, Augustine learned the paradoxical truth that happiness ("blessedness") was compatible with intense suffering and persecution. The purity of heart that Jesus stated as the premise for "seeing God" was demonstrated by Jesus in his unswerving and constant commitment of his human heart in obedience to his father, even through his shameful death by crucifixion.

### TO PRAISE THEE IS HIS JOY

It was during those early years in seminary that I discovered I am a religious person. I do not mean that I am a good person or a holy person. I am simply someone who delights in the worship of God, who finds the most significant activity in his life to be that centered in God. It was this, above all, that drew me to the monastic life—while candor forces me to acknowledge a bit of fear of the world's seductive power as well. As a young seminarian, my favorite moments were at the weekly vespers and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament that we shared with the monks who taught us: the stately sounds of the Gregorian chant; the solemn movement of monks in procession, as they entered choir in ranks and bowed profoundly before the altar; the prostrations and bows at the recitation of the *Gloria patri*; the dramatic vestments; and all the rhythm of liturgy carried out by people who had dedicated themselves to this "work of God." Surely some of the attraction all this had for me was aesthetic: the winter evening, the incense-filled church, the candles on the altar, and the golden monstrance glittering in the candlelight. But why draw a hard distinction between the aesthetic and the religious in the experience of an adolescent boy, when each intoxicated him in a way no human contact did. One impulse fed the other, and together, they allowed him to delight in praising the Lord. The monastic liturgy combined aesthetics and religious ritual in such measure as to give pleasure to a heart starved for a sense of deep communion.

I followed this longing into the cloister and spent nine years as a Benedictine monk. The happiness I felt in praising God was fed by a way of life constructed around precisely such praise. In the Divine Office—the round of choir prayer throughout the day—I found the rhythm of chant and movement deeply satisfying. The best moment of every day was when the entire choir of monks chanted the words of Psalm 95:6 (the psalm immediately preceding the one quoted at the start of the *Confessions*), "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our maker! For He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of His hand," and as we chanted these words, we genuflected in the presence of the invisible God. At this moment every evening, I had the sense of being rightly aligned with the order of things: God was our God,

3 See Matthew 5:3–12. These verses form part of a set of Jesus's teachings also known as the "Beatitudes." (Biblical quotations are taken from the New American Bible.)

we were his creatures, and the body language of submission and awe was the perfect expression of that truth.

What I experienced in the communal prayer of the Divine Office—even in its discordant moments, even when, at 5 a.m., aesthetics was as absent as consistent pitch in the chant—was an obscure awareness of participation in something larger and greater than myself: not merely the larger body of the choir engaged in joint effort (it is work, this “Work of God”) but, through that choir, the very source of my existence and the existence of all things. Such awareness became even more explicit and more acute when, after my ordination as a priest, I was able to celebrate the Eucharist. In no other action have I ever been so aware of being in precisely the right place and time, of reciting the right words and making the right gestures, as I was in the great Eucharistic prayer, when, in the presence of and for all the people present, I was able to stand before the Lord in praise and petition, in thanksgiving and awe, with words not my own but fashioned centuries before me and recited for centuries before me by other priests standing in precisely the right place and time before the Lord. Such was my sense of delight, my sense of joy or contentment during my years as a seminarian, monk, and priest. It was located exactly in the act of praise.

#### FOR THOU MADE US FOR THYSELF

Augustine supplies the reason why the praise of God is a source of happiness to humans, “this tiny part of all that Thou hast created”: Humans find happiness in the praise of God because they are creatures, and it is natural for creatures to honor their makers. Augustine’s statement corresponds perfectly with the vision of the world that is imagined and expressed by Scripture. But it also corresponds perfectly—and this is even more critical—to the deepest instincts of the human heart when they are not otherwise distorted. In this understanding, human happiness (or joy, or contentment) is a consequence of being rightly related to an objective state of affairs, namely, the order of creation. The objective state of affairs for humans is the condition of creatureliness; happiness depends on the subjective apprehension and acceptance of this condition.

Three distinct but interrelated aspects of Augustine’s pithy formulation deserve attention. The first is that each one of us is created by God: “Thou hast made us.” Here we catch a glimpse of the basic drama concerning human existence that is played out in Scripture, the drama of faith and idolatry. Both begin in the same place, the realization by humans of their contingency, of the non-necessity of their existence. Humans cannot account for themselves or ensure even an additional moment of their fragile existence. We are here in the world, yet we are the makers of neither the world nor ourselves, and just as the world passes away before our eyes even as it comes into being, so, too, do we experience ourselves as passing away even as we are coming into being.

The terror of non-existence that threatens them at every moment can drive humans to idolatry, which for Scripture is not a matter of paying homage to the wrong deity, but a disease of human freedom by which it rejects the very conditions of existence and seeks to establish security in being through its own efforts. Idolatry is treating that which is not ultimate as though it were ultimate, making something that is not God into a functional god for the sake of human security. Whether it be pleasure or possessions or power—the basic options are drearily few and predictable—the thing made ultimate by the frenzied and fearful human spirit is itself merely a creature and cannot bear the weight of worship; it exists as a god only through the homage of the human desperate to escape the truth of his existence: that he is utterly and always dependent and needy. The idolatrous impulse is the perfect existential expression of the “restlessness” of

which Augustine speaks. Refusing to “rest” in the truth of creatureliness, the idolator is driven to seek anywhere and everywhere a place of rest in some other created thing that can be treated as ultimate. The sadness and misery inherent in such restlessness is clear.

Just as for Scripture idolatry is not wrong belief but displaced freedom, so for Scripture faith is not the confession of the right god but the proper disposition of freedom. Faith begins in the same realization as idolatry does: human existence is non-necessary, derivative, contingent, and frighteningly fragile. But rather than be driven by anxiety to the compulsive search for security through the acquisition of pleasure, possessions, or power (treated as ultimate), faith regards contingent existence itself as a gracious gift, freely bestowed by the power that brings the human into existence at every moment and sustains him in the present. Not by means of elaborate scientific theories or by means of complex philosophical arguments, but by the simple leap of the human heart toward truth, faith accepts that the human presence in the world is neither a simple derivative of a self-contained worldly process, nor a cosmic accident, but rather the result of fashioning by the source of all that is in the world, the one who can be addressed as “Thou” by the creature made to perceive and greet the one infinitely more powerful, intelligent, and loving than himself, “Thou hast made us.” And in this truth, faith rejoices.

The second pertinent aspect of Augustine’s formulation “Thou hast made us” is the use of the pronoun “us.” Humans do not stand alone as God’s creatures; rather, they are only a “tiny part of all that Thou hast created.” Part of the deeply humbling realization of creatureliness is that each person is but a small piece of humanity, that God’s purposes for humans as a whole are not likely to be restricted or contained exclusively in any single human (certainly not me), and that in the last analysis, each human story is, in its basics, the same. We may be born as natural narcissists, convinced that we are the center of the universe, and our parents may collude in that fantasy by convincing us that we are indeed special, but if we are fortunate, the process of life itself will reveal the truth that we are not, any one of us, much more than neighbor or stranger when it comes to brains or beauty or balletic grace. What is sometimes called the “midlife crisis” is actually the intimation of the truth that our youthful vigor and the power of fantasy have prevented us from seeing: that we have one and only one life to live, and that in all important respects, it is like every other human life ever lived. We are, as my wife quietly reminds me, merely “common clay,” and our common walk toward death confirms that truth.

The other side of this truth, to be sure, is that each human has an indispensable role to play within the drama of idolatry and faith. Even as I am reminded by the great crush of common humanity of my smallness, I am reminded by the realization that “Thou hast made us” of my distinctive and inalienable dignity as a human. No one can say yes or no to my maker for me. It is entirely my responsibility to affirm or deny for “this tiny part of all that Thou hast created” within the world, “you have made me.” Each human carries the obligation to bear witness, within a very specific body and a completely arbitrary placement within the world, to the truth of his or her creatureliness, a witness that each human exercises in behalf of every other human: “[W]e are his creatures and the sheep of his flock.” The capacity and obligation to speak the truth of human creatureliness is the basis of both priesthood and prophecy. It is carried out, moreover, not only in behalf of all other humans, but as well in concert with all other creatures, each of which, in its own implicit way, is expressive of the creator’s intelligence and will while needing the explicit witness of the human voice to join the chorus of the creator’s praise.

The final phrase in Augustine’s statement is most significant: God made humans “for Thyself.” The Latin phrase is *ad te*, literally “towards you.” The phrase has a strong directional sense: humans are intrinsically, by their very fashioning, directed toward God. God is the proper human telos. Once more, two aspects of this remarkable statement command attention. The first

is that God has created humans precisely to be in relationship with him. God desires from humans a response commensurate with the gift of their fashioning. God craves from this creature what God cannot expect from any other creature, a dedication of human freedom to fellowship with God. Second, as Augustine would argue in another place, true human freedom is located not in the ability to choose this thing rather than that (*Liberum arbitrium*), but in their relationship with the true goal of their existence (*libertas*).<sup>4</sup> The implication is that the end of humans cannot be the world or any part of the world, but only the maker of the world and every part of it.

But here, precisely, is the difficulty for the disposition of human freedom, which so naturally tends toward idolatry, toward the location of the ultimate in something within the world that cannot be ultimate and, because it is chosen as ultimate, both distorts human freedom and is distorted by freedom's idolatrous choice. The difficulty is that God makes us for himself, yet God is not anything within the world; he stands apart from the world as its maker, as the implicit presence within and behind everything that is explicitly present. How can human freedom find its goal in the maker, when the maker never explicitly appears in what is made but remains the unthematic premise of what is made? If nothing that presents itself to us in the world can be God, how can we direct our freedom to God so long as we are in the world?

#### OUR HEARTS ARE RESTLESS UNTIL THEY REST IN THEE

I have already spoken of the restlessness of the heart that leads to idolatry: refusing to rest in the reality of creatureliness with all its dependence and inadequacy, the idolator rushes from thing to thing in the search for something that can serve as a surrogate for the divine. But there is also a restlessness—a “lack of quiet” (*inquietum*) in our hearts—of a more positive character, which is consequent upon the fact that while God cannot be identified with any object in the world, our hearts are so constructed as to seek the face of God. There is a sense in which the person of authentic faith must have as restless a heart as the idolator, although the result of this restlessness is quite different. The idolator seeks to rest as quickly as possible in any object that can serve as the stabilizer of his existence and worth. The person of faith pushes past any temporary resting place in order to seek the one whose presence in creation is not to be identified with any specific thing within creation.

The difficulty for the disposition of the actual human heart is that it is not at all easy to distinguish authentic faith from idolatry through the course of a life with its concrete decisions and choices.

How should I evaluate—or how would Augustine evaluate—the restlessness that drove me to leave the monastic life and the priesthood in my late twenties, leaving the sacred precincts to marry a divorced woman with six children and to pursue a life of scholarship and teaching as a university career rather than a monastic or priestly ministry? The story can be made more complex, but in its essence, I left the place where my delight was the praise of God to inhabit a world almost completely devoid of the explicit devotion that was mine in the monastery. Was mine the restlessness of an idolator who abandoned the presence of the living God in the round of daily monastic worship for the surrogates of pleasure, possessions, and power? Or was mine the restlessness of an authentic faith in the living God that, despite error and even sin in the process, actually sought to respond to the living God?

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Augustine, *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, Liber I.

At this distance, it is hard for me to sort out the components of my heart's restlessness during my last years in the monastery, even as I am aware that my sorting out is both less significant and more prone to distortion than the steady gaze of God into my heart both then and now. I was restless emotionally because it was becoming clearer to me that the sense of communion I experienced in monastic worship and fellowship was not enough to satisfy the hunger for personal intimacy that I had acquired over years of oh-so-slow psychosexual growth between the ages of thirteen and twenty-six. The older longing for a home that had, in part, brought me to the monastic life was now complicated by the more recent urging of hormones. My restlessness in my (ever-faithful) observance of the monastic life was fueled by a strong charge of emotional frustration, as I can see now, though at the time my tendency to specialize in intellectualization would have led me to deny any such influence. In any case, my heart no longer found the praise of God in the monastic ritual an adequate vehicle of happiness. That which appeared at the beginning to be the perfect explicit embodiment of God's praise (and of joy) now began to appear as inadequate to contain all that praise of God (and joy) entailed.

I do not want to minimize the role of hormones, for in the end they probably proved decisive, but there were other elements to my growing restlessness in the monastery that led me increasingly to regard it not as the place of my heart's rest (and happiness), but as an important but non-ultimate stage in the journey to the rest that can be found in God alone. First, my education in philosophy and theology gave me a greater sense of self-confidence concerning my ability to play within a larger arena. Students at Notre Dame Seminary (where I did philosophy), at Saint Meinrad Archabbey (where I studied theology for four years), and then at Indiana University (where I did religious studies) were not so far above me that I could not hold my own. The fantasy of being a scholar in the real world seemed increasingly less fantastic. So, the ambition to exercise gifts of which I previously had only a vague notion played a role. Second, my theological education made me acutely conscious of the ways in which the monastic life and I were not a lasting fit. I grew worried that the monastic life was for me too safe and comfortable, lacking the component of risk: understanding the response of faith in God in terms of obedience to rule and abbot seemed, I thought, to leave out a lot. I also discovered from the reading of Paul's Letter to the Romans that my performance as a monk fit perfectly the pattern of fearful compulsiveness that can be called works-righteousness. What was meant to be the expression of faith in the Living God turned out to be for me a means of measuring my performance against that of others. Finally, as an ordained priest, I experienced the same tension with the teaching office of the church as many other young theologians did with the publication of Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*. I could no longer in good conscience impose penance on those confessing the practice of birth control, since I regarded the church's position on the matter as both formally and materially in error. Yes, I was deeply restless, and the result was predictable: I left the monastery, married, took on the care of seven children, became a professor, and spent the next forty years in public trying to remain loyal to my Catholic heritage while, at the same time, serving as a critical voice within the church.

Despite the ways in which my restlessness was less than "divine discontent," with huge amounts of human frailty and folly intermixed, I have in the end considered my departure from the monastery more an act of faith than of idolatry. First, there was nothing in my new future that promised anything that idols characteristically offer: suffering, poverty, and powerlessness more than pleasure, possessions, and power were the immediate outcome of my risky decision—with the lagniappe of disapproval from family, friends, fellow monks, and the Vatican. Second, I see now that if I had stayed in the monastery despite the restlessness that (I am convinced now) God placed in my heart, that would have been idolatrous: the choice of the representation of God rather than the Living God.

## UNTIL THEY REST IN THEE

The last part of Augustine's cryptic formulation continues to challenge me at this late stage of my life. What does "until they rest in Thee" really mean? An obvious interpretation is that of traditional Christian eschatology. If humans have been made "toward God," as Augustine claims, then only with their participation in God's "Sabbath-rest" will their hearts also find a resting place. In this reading, restlessness—both the negative and positive sorts I have described—is an ingredient of human existence, and satisfaction for that restlessness can be found only after death, in the future life. A corollary would be that genuine happiness also is exclusively an eschatological reality, when humans hear Jesus say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master."<sup>5</sup> I have no difficulty with this understanding: certainly the fullness of joy must be understood in eschatological terms, for it is only when human participation in the divine life is complete that the striving of human freedom can fully rest.

My experience over the past forty years of worldly endeavor, however, has given me a glimpse of another possible understanding of "until they rest in Thee," one that sees the possibility of a genuine if relative happiness through active engagement with the world that God draws into existence at every moment. Certainly, when I compare my activities over these years to those in the monastery, they can be characterized as restless. They have at least been both multiple and demanding. I have committed myself to spouse and children and discovered that circles of care steadily expand rather than contract. I have dedicated myself to the role of the teacher within universities and seminaries, and have found former students to be as needy and demanding as present ones. I have written many books and articles and reviews, and I have found that publications beget invitations. I have traveled as a lecturer in an ever-widening world of expectation, and I have spent more time than I desired before one sort of camera or another. And, in my fashion, I have continued to worship in my parish as a Catholic layperson, teaching adult education there and in other local churches. In the midst of all these activities, I have discovered something about happiness and the restless heart. I have begun to understand how resting in the Lord is not a matter of finding some single spot in the world or some specific activity and making it absolute, but a matter of allowing any place and any practice, in all its relativity, to be the means of resting in the Lord, who cannot be defined by any time or place or practice, but remains the invisible premise of every time and place and practice. If the heart is centered in the invisible God, then it is freed to engage any manifestation of God's world in all its partiality without making that manifestation idolatrous. The restlessness is on the surface, and it shows itself in me as it does for others in fatigue and irritability and even occasional depression; the rest (and happiness) is deeper and less accessible, recoverable mainly through those moments of silent reflection when what lies beneath the surface has time to make itself known.

I have come to appreciate the oscillation in my own life between faith and idolatry that I tried to describe in an early book (*Faith's Freedom*).<sup>6</sup> When I am engaged in any one of these "projects" of mine—spouse, parent, teacher, writer—I experience something of the joy I first felt in the experience of monastic worship: I am caught up in a sense of being engaged with something large and important that demands my best efforts, and that engages others as well. My wife assures me that I am a better and more contented person when I am writing a large book, which consumes great amounts of my attention for great periods of time. My passion in each such endeavor tilts

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25:21.

<sup>6</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Faith's Freedom: A Classic Spirituality for Contemporary Christians* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990).



naturally and almost inevitably towards idolatry: I seek to make it absolute, seek to be the “best” parent, teacher, and scholar possible, to make that activity defining of myself and my happiness. But the multiplicity of commitments has also meant that each project is challenged and rendered relative by the other projects: the demands of family keep scholarship from becoming an absolute; the needs of students prevent writing from being an exclusive commitment. Being thus jolted from my temporary serenity and contentment in a single project, I naturally experience dismay and a sense of loss. Only slowly have I come to understand how God thus keeps me off balance and therefore in a constant state of faithful response rather than idolatrous repose. Even more slowly have I come to appreciate that “resting in the Lord” is not only an eschatological hope, it is also a condition of present human existence to the degree that my response in every circumstance is to the God who has placed me in this circumstance and, reliably, will pull me out of it the moment I make it, rather than God, my place of rest.

I am grateful that early in my life, for whatever reason, I was given the gift of this text from Augustine and have, throughout my life, found his statement to be a guide to my own desire for happiness. As I grow ever closer to a return to the “common clay” that we are reminded each Ash Wednesday is the inevitable end to our mortal human existence, I am ever more content to tend the ever more limited part of God’s world that is given to my care. In the quiet round of life with my wife and in the small accomplishments of the teacher and scholar, I do not despair at the passing of all human endeavor or the insignificance of all human achievement, but regard this time and place in God’s world to be precisely the right time and place, and await gladly (but not restlessly) the possibility of exchanging notes with Augustine himself on happiness, if we both should find ourselves called to the joy of our master.