Sermon - **Sermon for the Lesser Festival of St Augustine**
1 Thess 3:7-end and Matthew 24:42-end
Preached at Sawston, St Mary – 28th August 2025

1 Thessalonians 3:7–end

For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith. For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Matthew 24:42–end

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. 'Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. But if that wicked slave says to himself, "My master is delayed", and he begins to beat his fellow-slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know. He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of all our hearts
be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord our God.
Amen.

Sermon for the Lesser Festival of St Augustine

Readings: 1 Thessalonians 3:7–end; Matthew 24:42–end

Introduction

Today the Church keeps the festival of Augustine of Hippo - bishop, teacher of the faith, philosopher, poet, pastor. For over 1,500 years Christians have turned to him for insight into faith and the Christian life. He was a man of brilliance, but also of deep restlessness. He was not born a saint. He searched, he wandered, he stumbled, he doubted. And it was precisely through that restless journey that God worked out his purpose.

Augustine's story is not about perfection. It is about a restless heart that finally found its home in God. That is why his words still speak so powerfully today:

> *"You have made us for yourself, O Lord,*
> *and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."*

On his feast day, I want us to hold together three things:

- Augustine's restless journey,
- the readings we've just heard, and
- what his life still says to us about faith today.

1. Augustine the Seeker

Augustine was born in North Africa in the year 354. His father was pagan, his mother Monica a devout Christian. She prayed for him with tears, but as a young man Augustine was more interested in his own ambitions. He was brilliant at rhetoric, hungry for success, and he lived with a woman outside marriage, with whom he had a son, Adeodatus. Though raised in the faith, Augustine drifted far from it. He tried different philosophies, he wanted truth,

but he wanted it on his own terms. At one point he wrote: *"Lord, make me chaste - but not yet."*

That was Augustine: honest, flawed, searching.

At the age of 29 he left Africa and went to Rome, then to Milan, where he became Professor of Rhetoric. It was there that things began to change. He encountered Bishop Ambrose, whose preaching combined intelligence with deep faith. He wrestled with Scripture. He wrestled with himself. And at last, in a garden in Milan, he opened the Bible and read Paul's words:

> *"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ,*
> *and make no provision for*
> *the desires of the flesh"* (Romans 13).

It was the turning point. He gave up his old life, was baptised by Ambrose, and eventually returned to North Africa. By the age of 42, he was bishop of Hippo. Augustine's story shows us that faith often comes through struggle, not ease. He learned that only God could satisfy the restless human heart. And that conviction shaped everything he taught.

2. Augustine and the Readings

How do Augustine's insights connect with our readings today?

<u>First, Paul in 1 Thessalonians.</u>

Paul writes with affection:

> *"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love…*
> *May he strengthen your hearts in holiness."*

Notice how Paul puts the action in God's hands. Holiness is not a matter of human grit, it is God's gift. Augustine grasped this with clarity. He prayed: *"Give what you command, and command what you will."* In other words, if God asks something of us, God must also supply the grace to make it possible. Our holiness rests not on our effort alone, but on God's generosity.

Then, Jesus in Matthew.

Jesus says: *"Keep awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."* Augustine reflected deeply on this call to vigilance. For him, the heart of the Christian life was love - but love in the right order. He called this the *ordo amoris*, the order of love. Sin, he said, is not only loving bad things; it is also loving good things in the wrong order - putting self above neighbour, or creature above Creator. To keep awake, then, is to live with rightly ordered love: God first, neighbour second, self rightly placed.

For Augustine, watchfulness was not frantic speculation about the end. It was faithfulness in the present; loving God and neighbour rightly, day by day, so that whenever the Lord comes, our lives are already in tune with him.

3. Augustine's Gift to Us

It is easy to think of Augustine only as a great thinker, the man who wrote *Confessions* and *The City of God*. But, he was also a pastor, he preached daily, and he oversaw the care of the poor. In a time of hardship, he even melted down church treasures to pay ransom for captives – imagine the Faculty!

He insisted that the Church was not a society of the pure, but of the forgiven; a place of mercy where people could grow together in love. That is a word for

us today. The Christian life is not abstract theory it is about love → love that is restless for God, love that is strengthened by grace, love that is faithful in daily tasks.

On Augustine's day, we are reminded:

- Faith is longing for God - *our hearts are restless until they rest in him.*
- Holiness is God's gift - we *pray that God will strengthen our hearts and increase our love.*
- Watchfulness is daily faithfulness - *we stay awake by doing the tasks of love that are before us.*

In Conclusion

Augustine lived in restless times; the Roman Empire was crumbling, wars and uncertainty abounded. Yet he taught people not to despair. He pointed them to the deeper reality: That God is faithful; that Christ will come; and that in God alone we find rest.

Today we must take Augustine's words to heart.

We pray with Paul: *"May the Lord make us increase in love."*
We hear Jesus say: *"Keep awake."*

And we remember Augustine's confession:

"Our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

Could this be the Christian life in a sentence? 'restless longing, watchful love, and the promise of rest in Christ.'
Amen