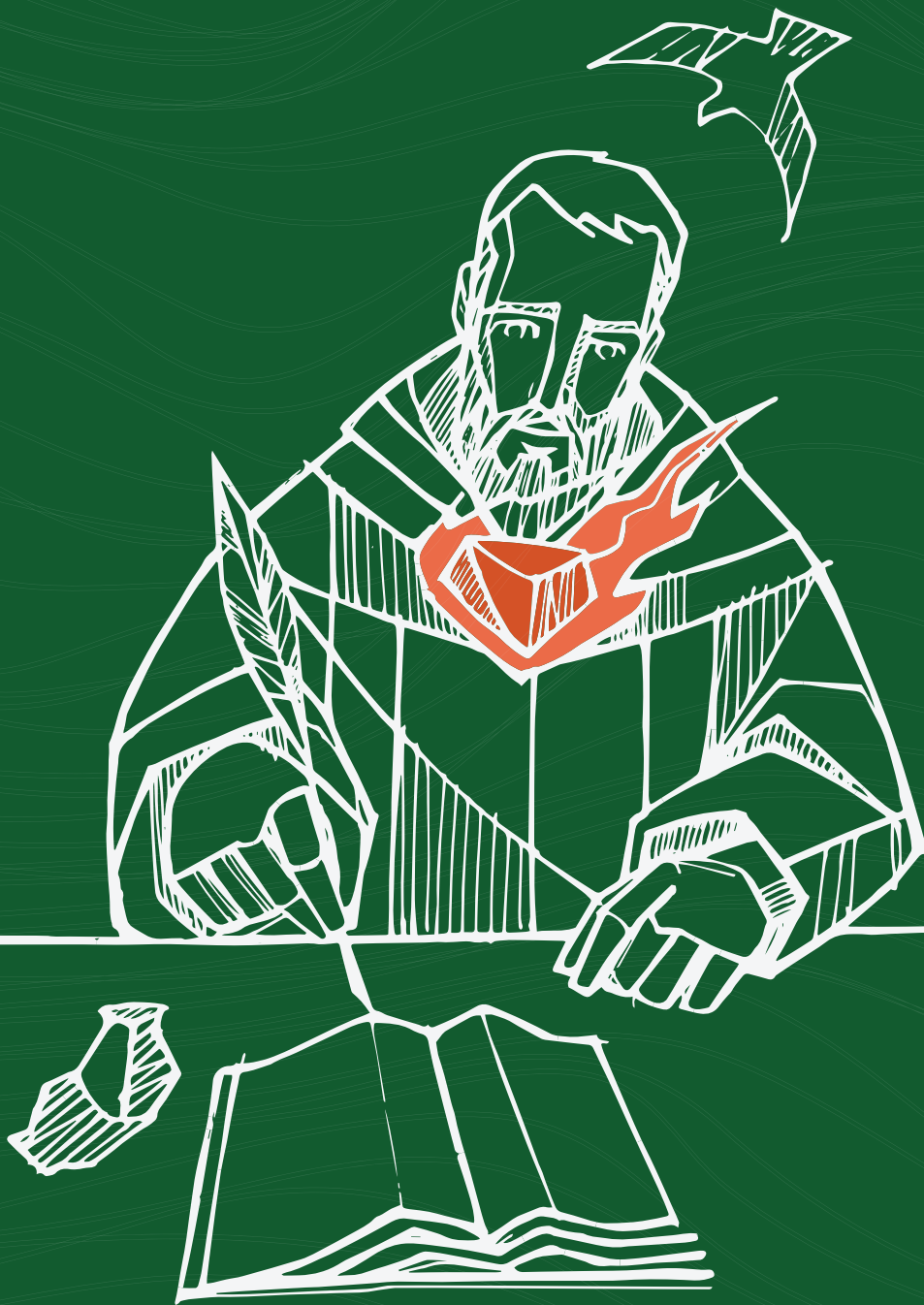




D i s c e r n t h e
VOCATION
with **st. Augustine**



"If you love Christ, follow Him!
I answer: I love him,
but where do I follow him?"

(St. Augustine, Treatise on the Gospel of John 34:8).

INTRODUCTION

Many people report that they came to discover their vocation thanks to the witness of someone who touched their heart. St. Augustine knows how to arrive at the heart because he speaks from the heart and shares his way of searching spontaneously.

Vocation animation is becoming more and more a permanent pastoral action in Christian communities. This permanent pastoral action is entrusted, above all, the task of vocation sowing, vocation accompaniment, and vocation discernment.

With the purpose of adding to this pastoral care of vocations, the following pedagogical resources are made available to help in the process of vocation discernment based on the vocation experience of St. Augustine.



S A I N T A U G U S T I N E

ST. AUGUSTINE **DISCERNED** HIS VOCATION



St. Augustine also discerned his vocation as a "servant of God" - or monk. Words of the saint himself: *"For a long time, I was occupied with many and various matters, and for many days I was trying hard to know myself, what I should do and what I should avoid, and suddenly a voice came to me, I do not know whether from myself or from another, from outside or inside; it said to me: to whom will you entrust yourself to go forward?"* (St. Augustine, *The Soliloquies* 1,1).

Augustine tells us the course of his journey until he came to embrace with all his heart the call that the Lord gave him to be "God's servant. " He says: *"I felt a lively desire for honors, riches, and marriage, and you, Lord, laughed at me. And in these desires I suffered bitter struggles, for you were closer to me the less you allowed me to find sweetness in what was not you"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 6:9).

After a long road of goings and comings, of falling and rising, of fulfilled dreams and painful failures, he looked inwardly: *"When I was deliberating about consecrating myself to the service of the Lord, my God, as I had placed in my heart for a long time, I was the one who wanted to, and I was also the one who did not want to. I was struggling with myself and tearing myself apart because I neither fully wanted nor did not want to"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 8:22).

He wanted to make a decision, but it was not so easy: *"And I was saying to myself: 'Let it be now, let it be now; and I almost arrived at a decision, I almost did it, but I did not succeed in doing it"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 8:25).

As if it were a duel to the death, he debated and fought relentlessly inside himself. The echo of his old vanities seduced him: *"Are you leaving us? And from this moment, will we no longer be with you forever and ever? And from this moment, will this or that never again be lawful for you? Do you think you can live without them?"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 8:26).

On the other hand, other voices echoed within him, the courageous witnessing of many Christians: *"Can you not do what these young men and women can? Or can they do it on their own, without the Lord their God? It was the Lord their God gave me unto them. Why do you stand on your own strength only to lose your footing? Cast yourself upon Him, and do not be afraid; he will not withdraw, and let you fall; cast yourself trustfully upon Him, and He will receive and heal you."* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 8:27).

The inner struggle of St. Augustine became more intense: *"But when a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul drawn together and heaped up all my misery in the sight of my heart; there arose a mighty storm, bringing a mighty shower of tears. Which that I might pour forth wholly, in its natural expressions, I arose and left Alypius, for solitude seemed to me more suitable for the business of weeping. I withdrew far enough to ensure that his presence—even his—would not be burdensome to me.* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 8:28).

It was only when St. Augustine gave up his pretension of wanting to control everything that God dazzled him: *"Throwing myself under the fig tree, I do not know how, I let go of the reins of tears, and two rivers flowed from my eyes. And I told you many such things as these; But You, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord? Will You be angry forever? Remember not against our former iniquities; for I felt that they enthralled me. I sent up these sorrowful cries —How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why is there not this hour an end to my uncleanness?"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 8:28).

Suddenly the brightness of a great light dispels the darkness in Augustine's heart: *"But behold, I heard in the nearby house a voice, as of a boy or girl, singing and repeating many times: 'Take and read, take and read! And, repressing the impetus of tears, I got up, interpreting this as a divine order to open the codex and read the first chapter I found. So in haste, I returned to the place where Alipio was sitting and I had left the codex of the Apostle when I rose from there. I took it, then; I opened it and read in silence the first chapter that came to my eyes, and it said:*

"Not in dissipation and drunkenness, nor in debauchery and lewdness, nor in arguing and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires" (St. Augustine, The Confessions 8:29).

Finally, Augustine grew in an option of life in Christ: *"A light of assurance seeped into my heart and all the darkness of my doubts was dispelled" (St. Augustine, The Confessions 8:29).*

God conquered him and this was his greatest joy: *"For you converted me to you that I no longer desired a wife nor cherished any hope in this world, being already in that rule of faith in which so many years ago you had shown me to her (his mother Monica). And so you turned her weeping into joy, much more fruitful than what she had desired and much more expensive and chaster than what she could expect from the grandchildren that my flesh (spiritual children) would give her" (St. Augustine, The Confessions 8:30).*



ST. AUGUSTINE ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE **ACCOMPANIED**



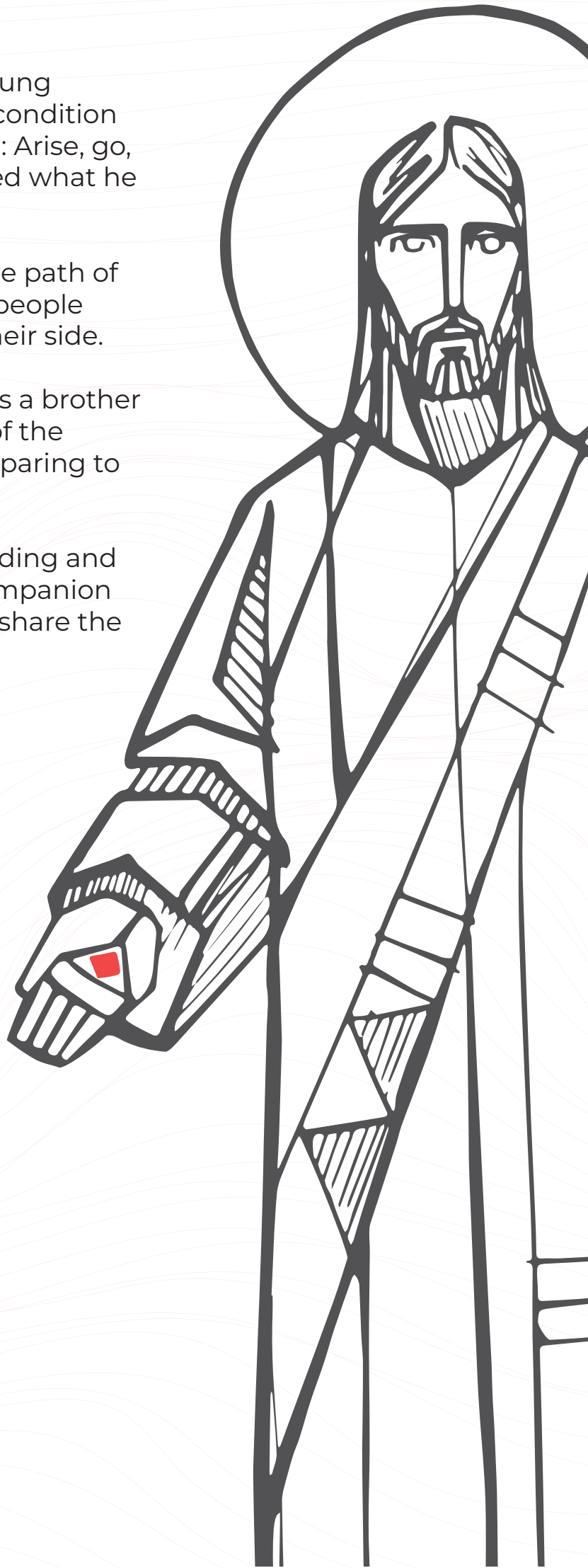
St. Augustine himself says about accompaniment: *"As for my life in this world, all was hesitation, and I had to purify my heart of the old leaven, and I even liked the way - Christ Himself - but I was lazy to walk through its narrowness. You then inspired me with the idea - which seemed to me excellent - to turn to Simplicianus, who appeared to my eyes as a good servant of yours and in whom your grace shone"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 8:1).

St. Augustine, at the most turbulent and confusing moment of his life, when he was no longer satisfied with his world of achievements, conquests and successes, but also could not find a way to determine a better life, sought help; he sought a companion: Simpliciano. And he granted this man the authority because: *"I had heard from him that from his youth he had lived devoutly, and since he was then already an old man, it seemed to him that for such a long age, spent in the study of the things of God, he would be very experienced and well instructed in many matters; and truly so it was. Therefore, I confided my concerns to him, so that he might indicate to me which path would be the most suitable in that state of mind in which I found myself to walk in the path of the Lord"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 8:2).

To whom do you grant authority in your life?

- Do you know the root of the word "authority"? It means "auctoritas", and indicates the capacity or ability of a person through which he/she makes other people grow.
- "Granting authority" does not express the idea of directive power, dominance or manipulation, but a real generative force that will help you bring out the best in yourself.

- When Jesus met the young people, in whatever state or condition they were in, he said to them: Arise, go, grow up! And his word fulfilled what he said (cf. Mark 5:41; Luke 7:14).
- In order to achieve a true path of vocation maturation, young people need authorized people at their side.
- A vocation companion is a brother who has already made part of the journey that you are now preparing to tread.
- You will never regret finding and counting on the help of a companion on the road, with whom you share the bread of your discoveries.



ST. AUGUSTINE BASED HIS DISCERNMENT ON THE **WORD OF GOD.**



St. Augustine is certain that he loves the Lord. How did he come to the deep conviction that his heart had made clicked with God's heart? The answer is given to us by himself: "*Lord, you had pierced my heart with the fire of your love, and I carried your words nailed to my entrails*" (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 9:3).

"You wounded my heart with your word, and I burned with your love" (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 10:8).

Why is the Word essential in the vocation discernment?

- To live confidently on a journey of vocation search and discernment, you must "let yourself be burned in the fire". Jesus said: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!" (Luke 12:49).
- The Word initiates us into the cause of Jesus, the Kingdom, his passion for God, and his passion for suffering humanity.
- Jesus' words set the hearts of his listeners on fire and stimulated them to infinity.
- The Word of God in the path of vocation discernment sets the hearts on fire in the same cause of Jesus; there is no vocation without a cause, inspiration, or passion.
- When the Word of God is silenced and no longer Heard in the heart, the cold wind of conformity and mediocrity blows in.
- If you really want to embark on the adventure of your life, let the Words of Jesus resound in your heart, so that they may kindle it in the fire of charity.

STEPS FOR THE DISCERNMENT OF VOCATION WITH ST. AUGUSTINE



Through the following Augustinian steps, we will go through the only discipleship itinerary in the following of Jesus Christ, whatever the path that concretizes this following may be. *"You are the one to be asked, you are the one to be sought, you are the one to be called: so shall it be received, so shall it be found, and so shall it be opened"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 13:53).

1st Step: Listen to your heart (restlessness and search)

Restlessness: *"Lord, you have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 1:1).

Search: *"Lord, I seek you in order to find you, and I find you in order to continue seeking you with greater ardor"* (St. Augustine, *On the Trinity* 15,2,1).

Why listen to one's own heart?

- I listen to my heart to connect with my deepest concerns and desires.
- I listen to my heart in order to enliven the dreams that are kneaded inside me.
- I listen to my heart to start walking in search of the answers to the crucial questions of my existence:
 - who am I?
 - where do I come from?
 - where am I going?
 - what is the meaning of my life?
 - for what purpose do I do the things I do?
- I listen to my heart because my innermost desires indicate the best direction.

- I listen to my heart because it depends on whether I am happy.
- I listen to my heart because, as St. Augustine would say, *"In the heart, I am what I am"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 10:4).

2nd Step: Know thyself (go back to the heart)

"God is always the same, may I know myself, Lord, may I know you" (St. Augustine, *The Soliloquies* 2,1).

Why does one need to know oneself?

- I need to know myself to befriend myself.
- I need to know myself to know what I need in order to be happy.
- I need to know myself to know what direction to give to my life.
- I need to know myself to find out what is the purpose of my life.
- I need to know myself to know what I have to offer to others.
- I need to know myself because, as St. Augustine would say, *"Lord, you created man in your image and likeness, he who knows himself recognizes you"* (St. Augustine, *Soliloquies* 1,4).

3rd Step: Focus on the essentials (love and be loved)

"To love and to be loved was the sweetest thing for me" (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 3:1).

Why is it important to focus on the essentials?

- I concentrate on the essentials because love is the heart of the Christian vocation.
- I concentrate on what is essential because the vocation to which God calls me is the one that will allow me to love more and better.
- I concentrate on what is essential because vocation is a non-renounceable intuition fixed in my heart that I must perceive within me, like a call to love.
- I concentrate on what is essential because only love inspires me and suggests the concrete path along which I must advance in holiness: the fullness of love.
- I focus on the essentials because I want to be happy, loving and being loved.

- I concentrate on what is essential because St. Augustine says, *"My weight is my love; it carries me wherever I am carried"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 13:10).

4th Step: Pilgrim on the Way (missionary disciples)

"Look that we are pilgrims. You ask me, what does it mean to walk? I sum it up in few words: to go forward, to progress. Move forward, my brothers" (St. Augustine, *Sermon* 168:18).

Why go on a pilgrimage on the Way?

- Pilgrim on the Way because Christ is the Way.
- Pilgrim on the Way because any option in following Jesus Christ has to do with the development of the baptismal condition.
- Pilgrim on the Way because the Christian vocation is a search process that is situated in the coordinates of the beatitudes.
- Pilgrim on the Way because it outlines the itinerary of the missionary disciples with its various stages: an encounter with Christ, conversion of heart, forming a disciple, creating the community, and living in mission.
- Pilgrim on the Way because the more one advances in following Christ, the more it unveils the mystery of one's vocation and mission.
- Pilgrim on the Way, as St. Augustine would say, *"No one is well off when he can be better off"* (St. Augustine, *On True Religion* 41:78).

5th Step: Know the different options (know what you are called to love)

"No one loves what he does not know" (St. Augustine, *On the Trinity* 10,1,3).

Why is it important to know the different options in following Jesus Christ?

- I know the different options in the Christian life because love is born of contact and relationship.
- I know the different options in the Christian life because I will have access to information that will help me understand profoundly the mystery of the call.
- I know the different options in the Christian life because I place myself in the wider perspectives of the forms of the Christian life.

- I know the different options in the Christian life because I am familiar with the form of Christian life in which I am called to love.
- I know the different options in the Christian life because only in this way will I love the path that Jesus presents to me so that I may follow it joyfully.
- I know the different options in the Christian life because, as St. Augustine would say, *"Command and order, O God, I beg you, whatever you wish, but heal my ears to hear your voice; heal and open my eyes to see your signs; banish from me all ignorance so that I may recognize you. Tell me where I must direct my gaze to see You, and I hope to do all that You command me"* (St. Augustine, *Soliloquies 1,1,5*).

6th Step: Consider the testimony of those who are already living a vocation (witnesses)

"Can you not do what these young men and women can? Or can they do it on their own, without the Lord their God? Why do you stand on your own strength only to lose your footing?" (St. Augustine, *The Confessions 8:27*).

Why do I consider the testimony of those who are already living a Christian vocation?

- I consider the testimony of those who live their vocation because, thanks to that, I can discover my own vocation.
- I consider the testimony of those who live their vocation because they encourage me to persevere in my good intentions.
- I consider the testimony of those who live their vocation because they awaken in me convictions and certainties.
- I consider the witness of those who live their vocation because they reflect the joy of the Gospel.
- I consider the testimony of those who live their vocation because they become teachers and companions on the path of my own search.
- I consider the witness of those who live their vocation because, as St. Augustine would say, *"I have companions who have accepted to live as I do, convinced by my service in the Church"* (St. Augustine, *Letter 157,4,39*).

7th Step: Sing and walk with me (St. Augustine).

Why sing and walk together?

- I sing and walk with my community because, as St. Augustine would say, *"they had one soul and one heart directed towards God"* (St. Augustine, *The Rule* 1:3).
- I sing and walk with my community because, as St. Augustine would say, *"Since we speak of the way, let us behave as if we were on the way: let the lighter ones wait for the slower ones and let us all walk together"* (St. Augustine, *Sermon* 101:9).
- I sing and walk with my community because, as St. Augustine would say, *"Let burning embers go out into the world and set everything on fire in the love of God"* (St. Augustine, *Sermon* 116, 6).
- I sing and walk with my community because, as St. Augustine would say, *"Pilgrims, walk with me"* (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 10:6).
- I sing and walk with my community because, as St. Augustine would say, *"The souls of many men are also many; but, if they love each other, they are one soul"* (St. Augustine, *Treatise on the Gospel of John* 14:9).
- I sing and walk with my community because, as St. Augustine would say, *"Consider yours what you love in your brother and let him consider his own what he loves in you"* (St. Augustine, *Sermon* 205,2).
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VOCATION ATTITUDE

PROPOSED BY ST. AUGUSTINE TO DISCOVER VOCATION



For St. Augustine, every step towards vocation search and discernment must be taken in humility:

"This is the way to God: first, humility; second, humility; third, humility; and as often as you ask me, I will tell you the same thing" (St. Augustine, Letter to Dioceses 118:22).

The Lord walks through humility; this vocational attitude is indispensable for the disciple of Jesus, the humble God: "This is the way: walk in humility to reach eternity. God-Christ is the homeland to which we go; Christ-man, the way by which we go" (St. Augustine, Sermon 123,3).



SAINT AUGUSTINE

