

Confessions - Book X - Chapter XX

by St. Augustine

Transcript

29. How, then, do I seek thee, O Lord? For when I seek thee, my God, I seek a happy life. I will seek thee that my soul may live.[340] For my body lives by my soul, and my soul lives by thee. How, then, do I seek a happy life, since happiness is not mine till I can rightly say: \"It is enough. This is it.\" How do I seek it? Is it by remembering, as though I had forgotten it and still knew that I had forgotten it? Do I seek it in longing to learn of it as though it were something unknown, which either I had never known or had so completely forgotten as not even to remember that I had forgotten it? Is not the happy life the thing that all desire, and is there anyone who does not desire it at all?[341] But where would they have gotten the knowledge of it, that they should so desire it? Where have they seen it that they should so love it? It is somehow true that we have it, but how I do not know.

There is, indeed, a sense in which when anyone has his desire he is happy. And then there are some who are happy in hope. These are happy in an inferior degree to those that are actually happy; yet they are better off than those who are happy neither in actuality nor in hope. But even these, if they had not known happiness in some degree, would not then desire to be happy. And yet it is most certain that they do so desire. How they come to know happiness, I cannot tell, but they have it by some kind of knowledge unknown to me, for I am very much in doubt as to whether it is in the memory. For if it is in there, then we have been happy once on a time--either each of us individually or all of us in that man who first sinned and in whom also we all died and from whom we are all born in misery. How this is, I do not now ask; but I do ask whether the happy life is in the memory. For if we did not know it, we should not love it. We hear the name of it, and we all acknowledge that we desire the thing, for we are not delighted with the name only. For when a Greek hears it spoken in Latin, he does not feel delighted, for he does not know what has been spoken. But we are as delighted as he would be in turn if he heard it in Greek, because the thing itself is neither Greek nor Latin, this happiness which Greeks and Latins and men of all the other tongues long so earnestly to obtain. It is, then, known to all; and if all could with one voice be asked whether they wished to be happy, there is no doubt they would all answer that they would. And this would not be possible unless the thing itself, which we name \"happiness,\" were held in the memory.

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