

Confessions - Book Xiii - Chapter Xxvi

by St. Augustine

Transcript

39. Those who find their joy in it are fed by these "fruits"; but those whose god is their belly find no joy in them. For in those who offer these fruits, it is not the fruit itself that matters, but the spirit in which they give them. Therefore, he who serves God and not his own belly may rejoice in them, and I plainly see why. I see it, and I rejoice with him greatly. For he [Paul] had received from the Philippians the things they had sent by Epaphroditus; yet I see why he rejoiced. He was fed by what he found his joy in; for, speaking truly, he says, "I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me has flourished again, in which you were once so careful, but it had become a weariness to you.[639] These Philippians, in their extended period of weariness in well-doing, had become weak and were, so to say, dried up; they were no longer bringing forth the fruits of good works. And now Paul rejoices in them--and not just for himself alone--because they were flourishing again in ministering to his needs. Therefore he adds: "I do not speak in respect of my want, for I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased and how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." [640]

40. Where do you find joy in all things, O great Paul? What is the cause of your joy? On what do you feed, O man, renewed now in the knowledge of God after the image of him who created you, O living soul of such great continence--O tongue like a winged bird, speaking mysteries? What food is owed such creatures; what is it that feeds you? It is joy! For hear what follows: "Nevertheless, you have done well in that you have shared with me in my affliction." [641] This is what he finds his joy in; this is what he feeds on. They have done well, not merely because his need had been relieved--for he says to them, "You have opened my heart when I was in distress"--but because he knew both how to abound and how to suffer need, in thee who didst strengthen him. And so he said, "You [Philippians] know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in regard to giving and receiving, except you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent time and time again, according to my need." [642] He now finds his joy in the fact that they have returned once again to these good works, and he is made glad that they are flourishing again, as a fruitful field when it recovers its fertility.

41. Was it on account of his own needs alone that he said, "You have sent me gifts according to my needs?" Does he find joy in that? Certainly not for that alone. But how do we know this? We know it because he himself adds, "Not because I desire a gift, but because I desire fruit." [643]

Now I have learned from thee, O my God, how to distinguish between the terms \"gift\" and \"fruit.\" A \"gift\" is the thing itself, given by one who bestows life\\

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