

Many people have assisted me in my spiritual journey. To all of them I am grateful. One of those is Augustine of Hippo, or as we usually refer to him, “St. Augustine.” When I mention my debt of gratitude to him, a person will from time to time say, “Oh, I remember reading his *Confessions*.” And I almost immediately have to say, “That’s one of his works I have not read.” But I have read his *On Christian Doctrine*, *City of God*, and many of his other books, tracts, letters, and sermons. Some of his statements have a way of embedding themselves into my brain. One of those is, “Anything you love too much to give up, you love too much.”

I will never forget a time when that statement haunted me. A little over thirty-one years ago, after graduating from college, my oldest daughter began teaching English as a Second Language in a mission school in Gabon, Africa. Already a secular Franciscan, she believed that God was calling her to become a sister in a religious order. In those days the mail was very slow and so she wrote a daily journal and sent it in installments as her way of staying in touch with us.

Needless to say, we looked forward to those installments, and they arrived regularly.

Then in one of those installments, she wrote, “I am o.k., but a man tried to rape me. One of the soldiers stationed here heard me scream and rescued me.” And then she continued telling about her daily activities.

Then when we next expected to hear from her, nothing came. We waited. Still no mail from our daughter. And I remembered, “Anything you love too much to give up, you love too much.” I think you can imagine what we, or at least I, began to think: “Oh, dear God, did the rapist come back? Why have we not heard from her?” And I kept remembering, “Anything you love too much to give up, you love too much.” After three or four agonizing weeks (They seemed like an eternity), I came here to the church. I went over to the votive candles and as I lighted one, I prayed something like this:

Dear God, please let me daughter be safe. She has so much to offer you, and she is open to your guidance. Dear Lord, I don’t know how you could want to take my daughter when she wants to give herself in service to you and to your people here in this world.

. . . . But, Father, I know that you know best, and so I place her in your hands.

As I ended my prayer, I will always remember the weight, the pain, that was lifted from my chest.

I don't know how I would have responded if, as I feared, my daughter had been raped and killed, but at that moment I felt free.

My wife tells me that I have tell you immediately why we didn't hear from her. She had gone into the jungle to teach Vacation Bible School and did not know until she arrived there that the area had no mail delivery.

I trust that you know why I tell you about this agonizing time in my life. Abraham had a similar experience, or perhaps I should say I had a similar experience to Abraham. How is it that the Church gives us this reading and the Gospel about the transfiguration today?

So often during Lent we do give something up. It may be desserts or chocolate or alcohol or T.V., and maybe we give some money to a worthwhile charity, or maybe we participate in study and prayer. These, of course, are good things, provided that we know why we do them. We "give up something" not to punish ourselves but rather to reduce our dependence on, or maybe even our addiction to, the many good things in our life, so that we do not become overly distracted by them. We free ourselves from their potential tyranny. Truly "Anything [we] love too much to give up, [we] love too much."

But to do what? I suggest to you that one of the most important reasons is so that we can do what the voice from the cloud said, following the affirmation, "This is my beloved Son." He then said, "Listen to him." God did not want to take Abraham's son Isaac or my daughter Joy, but he did want Abraham and me to trust him absolutely. That's what he wants from all of us. He wants us to quit talking (and my wife says I should take my own advice), to quit talking and to trust him, to start listening, really listening. In order to do that, we need to give up those things which so distract us that we cannot hear the needs of those around us. May God give us an open heart, the ears to listen, and the faith in order to obey his voice.