

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

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Augustine

4/5th-century bishop of Hippo

Homilies on the Gospel of John, 26.1-20

Likely presented at the Basilica of Saint Stephen in Hippo where Augustine pastored and served on an occasion between December-June, in 406 or 407.

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Biographical Sketch

- Augustine was born on November 13, 354 in Thagaste and died on August 28, 430 in Hippo.
- He has a powerful conversion story (*Confessions*, VIII.xi.29)
- He was baptized by Ambrose in Rome on Easter in 387. He served as a priest in Hippo from 391 to 396 and as the bishop of Hippo from 396 to 430.
- He served as bishop for thirty-four years, writing, shepherding, and defending the church against the Manicheans and the Donatists; against Pelagianism and Arianism.
- His body was put to rest in the Basilica of Saint Stephen in Hippo, the church where he taught and pastored.

The Late Roman Empire (AD 395)

Praefectura praetorio Galliarum :

- D. Britanniae
- D. Septem Provinciarum
- D. Galliae
- D. Hispaniae

Praefectura praetorio Illyricum:

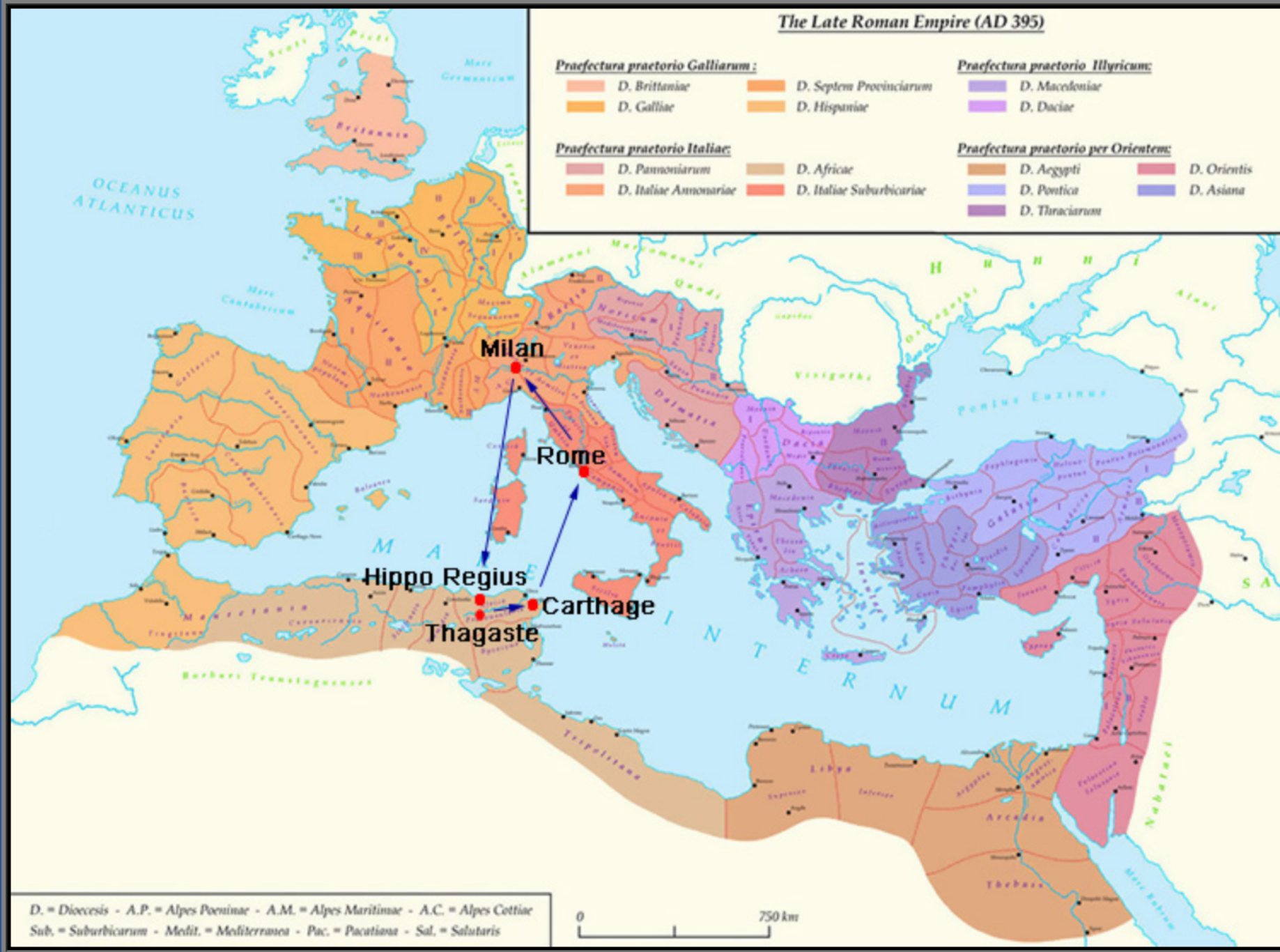
- D. Macedoniae
- D. Daciae

Praefectura praetorio Italiae:

- D. Pannoniarum
- D. Africae
- D. Italiae Annonariae
- D. Italiae Suburbicarum

Praefectura praetorio per Orientem:

- D. Aegypti
- D. Orientis
- D. Pontica
- D. Asiana
- D. Thraciarum



D. = Diocesis - A.P. = Alpes Poeninae - A.M. = Alpes Maritimae - A.C. = Alpes Cottiae
 Sub. = Suburbicarium - Medit. = Mediterranea - Pac. = Pacatiava - Sal. = Salutaris

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His Writings

- Augustine wrote many books, sermons, and homilies as he taught and defended the faith. Augustine's homilies on the Gospel of John are thought to have been preached between 406 and 407, between the months of December and June. His best known works are *Confessions* and *The City of God*.
- In his homily on John 6:41-59, Augustine comments on the bread of life discourse as a way to describe the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and makes several relevant observations related to how God nourishes his people.

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Approaching the Table in a Worthy Manner

- John 6:48-49. *I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.* Augustine connects eating with dying. He quotes 1 Corinthians 11:29: *For all who eat and drink without discerning the body eat and drink judgment against themselves.* He then highlights the importance of approaching the table in a worthy manner and exhorts us to examine ourselves before partaking of the Lord's Supper. Augustine told his people to "bring innocence along to the altar" and regarding the table of the Lord, he says to "approach without a qualm." (*Homilies*, 26.11)
- The bishop's heart is for his people to be at peace with one another as they come to the table. Knowing they will pray the Lord's Prayer before partaking of the elements, he reminds his people to be aware of what they say: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). He does not wish for them to be liars, and thus, encourages them to come honestly and peaceably to the table. We are called to do the same. (*Homilies*, 26.11)

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We Eat the Same Spiritual Food as Our Ancestors

- John 6:50. *This is the bread which comes down from heaven.* Augustine quotes Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: “I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food” (1 Corinthians 10:1-3).
- Augustine then states, “Yes, as spiritual it is the same; as bodily food it is different, since for them it was manna, for us something else; as spiritual food, however, it was the same as for us.” (*Homilies*, 26.12)
- We share the same spiritual food as that of our ancestors in the desert, people like Moses and Aaron. Our ancestors fed on manna, we feed on the body and blood of Christ, both spiritually and sacramentally.

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Drawing Strength by Communing with the Body of Christ

- John 6:51. *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.* Augustine stresses the importance of being a part of the body so that we can draw strength and life from Christ through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He admonishes his people to be at church regularly, asking them how they expect to be strengthened if they are not a part of the body? He then quotes the apostle Paul, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). (*Homilies*, 26.13)
- Connecting this passage to the Lord's Supper, Augustine writes, "O sacrament of piety, O sign of unity, O bond of charity! The one who wants to live has somewhere to live, has something to live on. Let him approach, let him believe, let him belong to the body so as to be given life." (*Homilies*, 26.13)
- Augustine's words to his people in Hippo are just as relevant to us today. To be nourished, we gather with the body of Christ, and we partake of the meal that feeds our souls.

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Union with Christ

- John 6:56. *Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.* Augustine emphasizes what it truly means to eat of Christ's body and drink of his blood. He quotes John 6:56 and then states, "This, therefore, is eating that food and drinking that drink: abiding in Christ and having him abide in oneself."
(Homilies, 26.18)
- Our union with Christ, our abiding with him and he with us, is the profound spiritual benefit of the sacrament. When we are communing with Christ regularly, with a clear conscience, we partake of the sacrament in a worthy manner and strengthen our union with our Lord.

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A few takeaways:

- (1) We are to approach the table in a worthy manner (“without a qualm”).
- (2) Christ was present in the wilderness as he is present in the church today (1 Cor. 10:1-3).
- (3) We commune and draw strength together as the body of Christ.
- (4) We experience union with Christ as we abide with him through the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.