

(In order to undertake the extensive renovations necessary to restore the century-old church of St. Augustine, the bishop of Constantin-Hippo sent out a wide appeal to religious, political, cultural, and private organizations for help. As members of the broader Augustinian Family, the Assumptionists, also known as the Augustinians of the Assumption, made a substantial gift to this worthy cause. As a result, they were invited to participate in the festivities celebrating the completion of the renovations and the raising of the church to the status of a basilica. The superior general, Fr. Benoît Grière, unable to attend the ceremonies, asked one of his assistants, Fr. John Franck, to represent him at the beginning of May. He sends us the following report).

The church of St. Augustine in Hippo, newly and magnificently renovated and duly raised to the status of a basilica, stands perched prominently on an isolated hill commanding a view of the

entire surrounding countryside: the Mediterranean coast, the modern city of Annaba, the imposing heights of the Edough plateau, and, at its feet, the vast complex of ruins of the ancient Roman and Byzantine city of Hippo.

On May 2, 2014, in the presence of numerous fellow bishops, including Philippe Cardinal Barbarin of Lyon and Most Rev. Thomas Yeh Sheng Nan, the apostolic nuncio in Algeria, and several hundred Christian and Muslim invitees, his Eminence, Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, special envoy of Pope Francis, presided at ceremonies marking the centennial of the church's construction and its recent designation as a basilica.



In his homily, Cardinal Tauran spoke of the special calling of the Christian community of Algeria. "In this land with a Muslim majority, the mission of the Church is to be present, even with small numbers, in order to bear witness to its faith in Jesus Christ." Of the newly renovated church, he said: “Yes, these stones express better than words the desire of the Christian community to remain faithful to its interreligious vocation, to continue to live and to work with her friends for the common good of the Algerian society. A church, like a mosque," Cardinal Tauran added, "has as its vocation to keep us close to God".



Cardinal Tauran urged the congregation to take to heart the example of Saint Augustine whose life, thought, and relationship with God are a model for us all: "to seek the truth by returning to the Teacher within, while loving beauty and pleasure provided they do not become an ideal or absolutes. To discover, each one of us, God's presence in the deepest corners of our soul. To recognize the hand of God in the beauty of nature, in clarity of thought, or in friendship shared. To love peace that cannot be established except through concrete measures of peace: ‘because one has had a greater claim to glory by eliminating wars with one's words than by eliminating other human beings with one's sword' (Epistle 229, 2). To appreciate friendship. To consider history as shaped by three co-existing factors --- providence, justice and peace : providence that guides the history of societies, justice that is imprinted as an ideal in the human heart, and peace that is the final goal.″

Cardinal Tauran concluded his homily by expressing his hope that we all "might learn from St. Augustine that understanding of the heart that would allow us to hear and welcome the suffering cry of the man alone, unemployed, marginalized, forgotten, imprisoned, or tortured."

Later in the day, during a conference attended by the leading religious figures of the city, Cardinal Tauran added: “living together as believers, being confronted with the same problems and difficulties... this spontaneity of relations is at the bottom of all dialogue and interreligious dialogue is always founded on friendship: we must always strive to know one another, to love one another, to move forward together".



The Algerian people is "a people that has taken responsibility for its history". It has "recognized that Augustine was Algerian ... and what an Algerian he was! A genius who bridged the gulf of the two Mediterranean coasts." The cardinal continued, "Saint Augustine wrote some of the most beautiful pages of theology while the city of Hippo was under siege. At the same time, he showered his care on refugees of war. He was a pastor who followed the daily life of his flock."





