

# The Garden Conversion of St. Augustine

*from Book VIII of the Confessions*

St. Augustine's conversion took place in a garden in Milan in the year 386. He was thirty-two years old, brilliant, successful, admired — and utterly torn within himself. For years he had prayed, "Give me chastity and continence... but not yet." His heart longed for God, yet his habits and attachments held him fast.

On this day, the inner conflict reached its breaking point. Augustine was speaking with his friend Alypius when a storm of emotion rose within him. He felt ashamed of his weakness, exhausted by his divided will, and overwhelmed by the sense that he could not free himself. He fled into the garden so Alypius would not see him weep.

There, under the branches of a fig tree, Augustine collapsed. He describes his tears as pouring forth "like rivers," his heart broken open by the weight of his own resistance. He cried out to God in anguish, asking why he kept delaying the surrender he knew he needed to make. He felt trapped between two loves — the old life that still clung to him, and the new life God was offering.

As he wept, Augustine suddenly heard a child's voice from a nearby house, chanting a phrase over and over: "**Take and read, take and read.**" He had never heard such a game before, and he felt the words strike him with unusual force. He interpreted them as a divine command.

Wiping his tears, he returned to the place where he had left the Scriptures. He opened the book at random and his eyes fell upon a passage that spoke directly to his struggle — a call to abandon the works of darkness and to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." The words pierced him. He needed no further reading. A light flooded his heart, and all the shadows of doubt were swept away.

In that moment, Augustine experienced a profound interior peace — not the peace of self-mastery, but the peace of surrender. The divided will that had tormented him for years was healed. He rose from the garden transformed, ready to begin a new life in Christ.

Alypius, who had witnessed the change in Augustine's face, took up the Scriptures himself and found a passage that confirmed his own conversion. Together they returned to Augustine's mother, St. Monica, who rejoiced with tears of her own.