

When I was in China the first time, I knew all of about 20 words; and half of those were the numbers 1 through 10 – which doesn't help much in conversation. And on top of that, Chinese is written in hieroglyphics. If it were Italy, Germany, or any other western country, the language is phonetic and I can make an attempt at pronunciation. With Chinese, unless you know the symbol, you're lost.

The point is that I could hear, but could not understand. I could see, but not comprehend.

In today's Gospel, the disciples asked Jesus "Why do you speak to the crowd in parables."

Jesus' reply sounds harsh, but in actuality, when he says "[it] has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted," what he is talking about is grace.

Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah, "You shall indeed hear but not understand; you shall indeed look but never see."

If we want to understand God's Word, or if we want to understand God's will ... we can only do so in His grace.

Saint Augustine was a brilliant scholar, well versed in the Latin and Greek classics. When he first looked at Scripture, he considered it to be garbage. You see, Scripture is written in Koine Greek, that is, the common spoken Greek that you would hear in the marketplace; not the classical Greek of Homer and the ancient poets. To Augustine, it was worthless because it wasn't well-written.

But of course we know that it isn't the package, it's what's inside that matters.

Anyway, at a low point in his life, Augustine was sitting in a courtyard. His mother, Saint Monica, had given him the book of Gospels to read, and he had no interest in reading this poorly-written book of Jewish history. He was too smart for that. He was too good for that.

But as he was sitting there, a child walked by singing a simple phrase in Latin – "Tolle, lege! Tolle, lege!" that is "Take and read! Take and read!" It's probably part of something he learned in school that day.

But at the same time, on the other side of the wall, in the courtyard; sat Augustine, on a bench, next to the Gospels. At that moment, he took, and began to read. And his eyes were opened to the depth of the Gospels, and he understood.

Grace doesn't come to us in the ways we expect. But God's grace is always being poured out on us in abundance. It is up to us to take that grace into our lives and make use of it. We need to be open to receive God's grace how ever it may come to us.

And no matter how under-qualified or insignificant we may feel, or how brilliant or qualified we may think we are, God's grace comes to us in unexpected ways.

Let us pray to be open to receiving God's grace, however it may come to us, in big and little ways. That we may see with our eyes, our eyes of faith, opened by grace, and hear with our ears of faith, to see and hear and understand God's will and God's word for us, and grow in God's grace for the greater glory of God.