

## St. Monica

Today, the Church puts the beautiful St. Monica before us, who was the mother of St. Augustine. As many of you know, Monica is the great inspiration for all parents (especially mothers!) who have children who have gone astray from practicing their faith. She was born around 331 or 332 A.D. in Tagaste (present-day Algeria). Most of what we know about Monica comes from St. Augustine's *Confessions*.

Monica's parents forced her to marry Patricius, a pagan Roman official with a violent temper and unfaithful habits. It was a difficult marriage. As you can imagine, Monica suffered tremendously. To make matters worse, Monica also had to bear with her mother-in-law, who lived in her home. Through her endless patience and prayer, she converted both her husband and her cranky mother-in-law to Christianity before they died.

Monica and Patricius had three children – two boys and a girl. Despite all the difficulties, she brought them up in faith and piety. The oldest was Augustine, who is the most famous. From an early age, it became evident that Augustine was *extremely* gifted.

Unfortunately, Augustine had accepted a heresy called Manicheanism, a heresy that taught all matter was corrupt. Moreover, Augustine was living an immoral lifestyle. Monica could have become bitter, but she became better. She poured her heart out to God and knew that he had a plan. She maintained hope!

At this point, Monica had a vision or dream that one day her rebellious teenager would return to the faith. Subsequently, she stayed close to her son, praying and fasting for him. Oftentimes, she stayed a little closer than Augustine wanted. "Augustine, it's me, your *mom!*" ☺

Monica's presence wore on Augustine so much that in his famous book, *Confessions*, he tells us that when he was 29 years old, he lied to his mother in that he told her was going to say goodbye to a friend. Instead, he got on a boat in Carthage and set sail for Rome. Like Jonah, he was fleeing from his mother.

Eventually, Augustine made his way to Milan where St. Ambrose was bishop. Monica, heartbroken, followed him. She was like gum on his shoe! While in Milan, Monica led a quiet and devout life as a constant reminder to her son that he needed to return to the Church. In some sense, one could say that she was Augustine's conscience.

In Milan, she met the great bishop Ambrose, who became her spiritual director. There in Milan, she became a leader of the devout women as she had in Tagaste.

Monica continued her prayers for Augustine until finally he accepted instruction in the faith. She had prayed for *17 years* for his conversion! She gave God all the glory as her son was baptized at Easter in 387 A.D. Imagine the great joy of both Monica and Augustine on that day!

Shortly after Augustine's conversion, Monica became ill and suffered severely for nine days before her death. Before dying, Augustine says she asked for one thing: "*that you remember me at the altar of the Lord wherever you may be.*" Monica had gone to Mass every day, sometimes twice a day, asking for her son's conversion. And now, she asked Augustine to remember her at the altar.

Monica reminds us of the power of persistent prayer. She never stopped praying and fasting for the conversion of her husband, Patricius, and her son, Augustine, proving that relentless prayer is heard by God.

Monica also reminds us of the power of silent witness. She was married to an angry husband and cranky mother-in-law. Monica knew that it took more strength to stay silent than to fight back.

Furthermore, Monica endured betrayal and a harsh temper with charity instead of becoming bitter. Her patient love softened the hearts of those around her.

Finally, Monica is a great reminder of the beauty of refusing to give up! She stayed close to her son through his rebellious years without nagging, offering a constant witness of mercy and hope rather than giving in to despair. St. Ambrose famously said to her, "The child of so many tears shall not perish." She is a powerful witness of hope and tenacious love!

God has a great sense of humor in that Augustine spent so much of his life trying to get away from his mother while he lived on earth. Now their feast days are right next to each other for all eternity - St. Monica (Aug. 27) and St. Augustine (Aug. 28<sup>th</sup>). Monica is before Augustine – it was a mother's love, patience, and perseverance that gave us the great St. Augustine.

Today, it may be your prayers, your love, and perseverance that give us another great saint that we so desperately need today.

~St. Monica, pray for us!