

Let us persist in Prayer like the Canaanite Woman and St. Monica

Dear beloved parishioners, on August 27 we celebrate the feast of St. Monica a mother persistent in her prayer for her brat son & her ruthless son St. Augustine's feast on August 28.

I think it is only when we are in the next life that children will learn how much their parents prayed and sacrificed for them. One mother who prayed a great deal for one of her children is St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. She lived in Tagaste in North Africa which is called Algeria today. Monica and her husband Patricius had three children, Augustine, Navigius and Perpetua. Navigius was always a good son, and Perpetua became a nun and abbess. But Augustine was different. As a teenager he was influenced by the loose living of his companions. When studying in Carthage he decided to take a mistress. Augustine was, as we would say now, such a brat that he even once said to Monica his mother that there would be no problems between them if she gave up her faith!

Haunted by questions about the nature of good and evil, Augustine became disillusioned with Manichaeism. His entry into this sect, which regarded matter as evil and promoted "liberation" from the physical world, caused his mother intense grief. So too did Augustine's fathering of an illegitimate child. After that he turned to the later followers of Plato, whose concept of God agreed in some areas with Catholic doctrine. When Augustine was 29 he moved to Rome to teach rhetoric and then he moved to Milan where he received a position teaching rhetoric. Monica moved to Milan after him. And Monica was so desperate went to a bishop who advised her to be patient. He told her it would be impossible that a son over whom she had shed so many tears would perish and that he would soon return to the faith. From then on, she stayed as close as possible to Augustine and she prayed and fasted for his conversion. Augustine often heard Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, preaching and this is probably what sowed the seed of faith in his heart. All the prayers of his mother Monica for his conversion were now beginning to be heard after many years of

seemingly being unheard. Augustine began to study the New Testament and especially Paul. He was close to being baptized but could not take a decisive step. His soul was crying out for conversion but his body said "no." "Lord make me chaste but not yet" describes Augustine at this stage. The turning point came when one day Augustine read a passage from Rom 13:13-14 "put on the Lord Jesus and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires." Augustine described in his Confessions telling his mother that his struggle was over. She leaped for joy and understood that God had given Augustine more than she had begged. Augustine also turned his ear to the preaching of St. Ambrose of Milan, whose sermons removed some of his difficulties in believing the Bible. A deeper conversion of his heart and will. This occurred in 386 when, at age 33, he tearfully agreed to abandon his personal vices and enter the Church.

The intellectually restless convert received Baptism from St. Ambrose on Easter of 387, shortly before the death of his holy and beloved mother Monica. Having abandoned his academic career and sold his possessions, Augustine soon began his work as a Catholic apologist and theologian. While waiting in Ostia, the port of Rome, to catch a boat back home, Monica said to Augustine, "I have no further delight in anything in this life...There was one thing for which I desired to linger a little while in this life, that I should see you a Catholic Christian before I died...Why am I still here?" Five days later Monica caught a fever and went into a coma and died after nine days. Augustine devotes many passages of his Confessions to his mother and all he owed her.

Not long after, a group of local believers persuaded him to enter the priesthood, which he did in 391. From 396 until his death, Augustine served as the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. Anyone who has picked up a copy of his Confessions, The Happy Life, realizes quickly that his questions, answers, and insights resonate in our hearts today. Augustine was baptized by Bishop Ambrose of Milan and he and Monica decided to return to North Africa.

A Saint, a sinner, a poet, a philosopher, an author, a father, a bishop, a doctor of the Church, a father of the Church - there are so many ways to look at the saint for today. Yet above all, he is Christ's. He is a disciple, or perhaps he, like St John the beloved, would describe himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

For a sinner the greatest thing about the Lord Jesus is that He identified Himself and revealed Himself to the lost. For St Augustine of Hippo, this was the greatest thing about Jesus Christ, which came through almost on every page of his writings. He never got over the fact that God called him out of darkness into his marvelous light. However great and noble, lofty and poetic his writings may be - he never stopped rejoicing in the very simple truth that he is loved by God. "You called, shouted, broke through my deafness; you flared, blazed, banished my blindness; you lavished your fragrance, I gasped; and now I pant for you; I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for your peace."

As St. Augustine, for in his writings we encounter all the heights and depths of the human spirit, all the questioning and seeking and searching that are still ours today. He was born in an age of crisis and transition that was only too like our own, an age in which faith was not something taken for granted but had to be sought and found in the midst of human experience and of the abysses it opens to the heart of man.

"The restlessness of Augustine lead him to an encounter with Christ", the Pope says, "but it did not induce him to turn in on himself. Even in the discovery of God and in the encounter with Him, Augustine doesn't stop, doesn't rest, doesn't become closed in on himself like those who have already arrived, but continues along the way." **Amen.**

Happy Feast of Sts. Monica & Augustine to all. See you in the Church. God bless you.

Be Blessed and Be a Blessing.

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