

The Church honors Saint Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine whose holy example and fervent intercession helped both husband and son turn away from sin and turn to God. Through an arranged marriage, Monica married Patricius, a Roman civil servant who strenuously objected to the Baptism of their children. Persistently prayerful on behalf of others, Monica's prayers for her husband bore fruit when he was baptized later in life, a year before his death in 371.

"For God did not call us to impurity but to holiness" (1 Thes 4:7). When the values of a parent differ from that of a growing child, there is often great stress in the family. Monica shunned her son when he fathered a child out of wedlock and began to practice a false religion. Her son Augustine was intellectually curious and looked for God in all the wrong places. The last thing he would do at this stage in his life is listen to his own mother in matters of faith.

Just as Joseph had a change of heart about Mary after an encounter with an angel of the Lord in a dream, Monica had her own change of heart after seeing in a dream that her efforts were not being wasted on her son even though there seemed to be no immediate change of behavior. Five years had passed since their estrangement, but Monica welcomed her son back home and continued her fervent prayer for his conversion. Like the wise virgin who kept oil in her lamp, Monica was ever vigilant in prayer waiting for the Lord to accomplish what her own parental influence could not.

Restless and still searching for God in the wrong places, Augustine abruptly left his mother and journeyed north to Italy eventually taking a teaching position in Milan. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, had a great impact on Augustine. He renounced his faith in false gods and turned his intellectual curiosity to Christianity. Monica came to Milan and saw the change in her son as he was drawn to Christianity under the influence of the great father of the church, Bishop Ambrose. "After three years of struggle against his own desires and perplexities, Augustine succumbed to God's grace and was baptized in 387."<sup>i</sup> Monica's long and prayerful journey bore fruit well beyond her own life.

"The heavens proclaim his justice, and all peoples see his glory" (Ps 97:6). When the family decided to return home to Africa, mother and son were one in faith and in awe of God. In Ostia, the two spoke of their deep faith and love of God. "Monica shared a profound mystical experience of God with Augustine, who chronicled the event in his *Confessions*."<sup>ii</sup> "Son, there is nothing now I care for in this life. What I shall now do or why I am here, I know not. The one reason I had for wishing to linger in this life a little longer was that I might see you a Catholic Christian before I died. This has God granted me superabundantly in seeing you reject earthly happiness to become His servant. What am I to do here?" (*Confessions of Saint Augustine*).

Shortly thereafter, "Saint Monica died at age 56, in the year 387."<sup>iii</sup> Monica continues to inspire prayers and penance among Catholics whose children have left the faith. Her son Augustine returned to Africa and became a bishop serving there for 34 years. Monica's prayers were more than answered as her own son became a saint and a Father of the Church like his mentor Bishop Ambrose of Milan.

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<sup>i</sup> catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-monica-572

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.