

FEAST OF ST. MONICA

Oh, the blessing of mothers! In one way or another, we can all appreciate Monica. For all of us, life begins in the family and perhaps the first significant relationship most of us form is with our mother. Who is this woman we honor today, and can we really speak of her apart from her son, Augustine?

Some saints are easy to picture. I always felt that way about Monica. Some would see her as a nagging mother. I can imagine Monica offered more advice to Augustine than many mothers would dare to offer their children. Nagging is really not such a bad thing, especially if one's motivations for doing so are in right order. Yet, I wonder if Augustine came to his conversion not because of, but in spite of, his mother being a bit of a "nudge."

Consider this. Was Monica too concerned about appearances? Or did she just want the best for her son? Was she overly ambitious in seeing her son's career as a rhetorician take off? How did she handle his longstanding live-in girlfriend? And when Augustine got involved in the Manichean religion, how did that sit with her, coming as she did from the traditional and simple piety of the North African Church? She probably threw her hands up in despair!

Yet, through these phases of Augustine's journey, Monica never stopped praying. It is her prayerful spirit for which she is probably best remembered. Through Monica's prayerful influence and God's grace, Augustine's heart was transformed. He grew in freedom, and that inner freedom enabled him to say "yes" to God. The story of Augustine's conversion is one of the best recorded in literature.

Monica's life and faith reveal to us the challenge and blessing of waiting patiently on the Lord. As we remember her this day, let us give thanks for our mothers, living and deceased, and for all who have influenced us on our journey.

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