

SAINT MONICA (333-389)

MOTHER OF ONE OF OUR GREATEST CHURCH LEADERS

The story of Saint Monica is the story of the tremendous strength and endurance of a mother's love. Born in 333 at Tagaste in North Africa, she was given in marriage while quite young to Patricius, a pagan of violent temper. Because of her husband's infidelity, her marriage life was an unhappy one. Patricius was vexed at Monica's prayers and works of charity. But we have it from St. Augustine himself that despite Patricius' cruelty and unfaithfulness, Monica "served him as her lord." Shortly before his death, Monica's husband was converted. With the death and conversion of her husband, Monica's sorrows should have ended; however, such was not the case.

Augustine was the eldest of St. Monica's three children. At the time of his father's death, Augustine was studying at Carthage. He had joined the Manicheans in their revolt against the Church. Moreover, he was openly living a life of sin. Monica was heartbroken. She loved her son Augustine very dearly, as he himself tells us, "For, as a mother, she loved to have me near her, and this much more than most mothers." Meanwhile as Augustine followed the way of the world, Monica prayed. One day in her distress, she approached a bishop and told him of her wayward son. His answer helped to console her, and encouraged her to continue her efforts to convert Augustine: "Go your way. God bless you, for it cannot be that the son of so many tears shall perish."

All these years, Augustine, who was one of the most discerning minds of all time, was searching for the truth. He had eventually seen the falsity of his beliefs. In his "Confessions," he testifies to the efficacy of his mother's prayers, "O my God! If at this critical moment you did not abandon me, it was because of the tears with which my mother pleaded for me, day and night, and of the sacrifice of her heart's blood for my salvation." Disappointed, Augustine set out for Rome, and later went on to Milan. Monica, with all her mother's love, could no longer bear to be separated from the son of her tears, so she too journeyed to Milan, and there redoubled her prayers and tears. St. Ambrose was at that time Bishop of Milan, and it was through his influence that Augustine was at length converted.

For seventeen years, Monica had asked God for this great grace. At last her prayers had been answered. Monica knew that death was near. She cared little whether she died in Italy or Africa. "Lay this body anywhere," she said. Some friends asked her if she was afraid of death, now that she was so far away from her native land. "Nothing is far from God," she answered. "Neither do I need to fear that He should not know in the end of the world whence He should raise me again." And so at age 56, Monica went home to God.

SAINT AUGUSTINE (354-430)

THE MAIN CONTRIBUTOR TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE EARLY CHURCH AND SON OF SAINT MONICA

Augustine, who lived from 354 to 430, is the greatest of the Latin Fathers and one of the most eminent Western Doctors of the Church. Augustine was born on November 13, 354, in Tagaste, Numidia (now Souk-Ahras, Algeria). His full name was Aurelius Augustinus. His father, Patricius, who died around 371, was a pagan but later converted to Christianity. His mother, Monica, was a devout Christian who labored untiringly for her son's conversion and who was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. Augustine was educated as a rhetorician in the former North African cities of Tagaste, Madaura, and Carthage. Between the ages of 15 and 30, Augustine lived with a Carthaginian woman whose name is unknown. In 372 she bore him a son, whom he named Adeodatus, which is Latin for "the gift of God."

Intellectual Struggle: He considered becoming a Christian, but experimented with several philosophical systems before finally entering the Church. Augustine left Carthage for Rome around 383. About a year later, he went on to Milan to teach rhetoric. During this time, Augustine again was attracted to Christianity. At last one day, according to his own account, he seemed to hear a voice, like that of a child, repeating, "Take up and read." He interpreted this as a divine exhortation to open the Scriptures and read the first passage he happened to see. Accordingly, he opened to Romans 13:13-14, where he read: "...not in revelry and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." He immediately resolved to embrace Christianity. Along with his natural son, he was baptized by Ambrose on Easter Eve in 387. His mother, who had rejoined him in Italy, rejoiced at this answer to her prayers and hopes. She died soon afterward in Ostia.

Bishop and Theologian: He returned to North Africa and was ordained in 391. He became Bishop of Hippo (now Annaba, Algeria) in 395, an office he held until his death. The Roman Catholic Church has found special satisfaction in the doctrines of St. Augustine. In fact, both the Roman Catholic and Protestant theology — the more purely theological aspects — are largely based upon St. Augustine's doctrines. John Calvin and Martin Luther, leaders of the Reformation, were both close students of Augustine. In St. Augustine's theology, men and women are saved by the gift of divine grace. Augustine died at Hippo, August 28, 430. His feast day is August 28.

Works: The place of prominence held by Augustine among the Fathers and Doctors of the Church is comparable to that of St. Paul among the apostles. As a writer, Augustine was prolific, persuasive, and a brilliant stylist. His best-known work is his autobiographical "Confessions" (circa 400), exposing his early life and conversion. In his great Christian apologetics "The City of God" (413-26), Augustine formulated a theological philosophy of history. His other writings include the Epistles, of which 270 are in the Benedictine edition, variously dated between 386 and 429; his treatises On Free Will (388-95), On Christian Doctrine (397), On Baptism: Against the Donatists (400), On the Trinity (400-16), and On Nature and Grace (415); and Homilies upon several books of the Bible.

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Scripture Focus: *Hezekiah became king when he was 25 years old, and he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done. (2 Chronicles 29:1-3)*

Opening Statement: The Bible only tells us one thing about Hezekiah's mother. Her name was Abijah. But the surrounding scriptures speak volumes about this woman's character. Abijah was married to King Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah. In 2 Chronicles 28:1-3, the Scripture says that Ahaz was wicked and did not obey the Lord. It is even more important to note that he sacrificed his children to the god Molech in the Valley of Hinnom. The scriptures do not reveal how Abijah was able to protect Hezekiah from being sacrificed, but he lived to be king. Even more importantly, though Hezekiah's father was ungodly and the family lived in the midst of idolatry and sin of every kind, his mother Abijah raised Hezekiah to be a godly king.

This same type of powerful godly influence can be seen in the life of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine the main architect of the doctrine of the Christian faith. In the early years of the church, many doctrines and beliefs were practiced or discarded depending of the view of a particular bishop or church counsel. As the Bishop of Hippo (395-430), Augustine was largely responsible for shaping a solid theology and doctrine of salvation, grace and other principles of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches that stand until this very day.

During Augustine's young and rebellious years, his mother prayed fervently that he would one day give his heart to the Lord. After talking with one of the bishops, she found peace in his counsel concerning Augustine. The bishop told Monica: "Go your way; God bless you, for it cannot be that the son of so many tears shall perish."

Observations: What similarities do you see between Abijah and Monica?

Interpretation: In Chronicles 29:1, why do you think that the bible mentions the name of Hezekiah's mother and his grandfather, Zechariah?

Personalization: Name three things that you would do, (or have done) as a mother in order to be a godly influence. Please find 3 scriptures that support your actions.