

A Wise Virgin

The Feast Day of St. Monica

August 27, 2021

About 331 AD in North Africa, a baby girl was born who would become the mother of one of the most influential Christians of all times. Monica was born into a moderately wealthy family. An old Christian maidservant, who had also cared for Monica's father as a baby, brought Monica up in the Christian faith.

Monica was given in marriage to Patricius, who was not a Christian. For many years Monica sought to win Patricius to the Lord. She followed the advice of I Peter 3:

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives¹

Monica realized her conduct more than her words would be the means of Patricius' conversion. By her persevering in patience and meekness, Monica won her mother-in-law to Christ. Patricius too became a Christian, though only towards the very end of his life.

Monica was often a great peacemaker between people who were at odds. In healing discords or disputes, she never repeated the evil, bitterness or hatred which one side might express against the other. She also sought to help and minister to those who were teachers or pastors of the church.

Though the wife of a non-Christian, Monica prayed that her family might eventually all come to Christ. She attempted to bring her children up in the ways of the Lord, and it pained her to see them stray from the truth she had taught them. Her most promising son, Augustine, was given an excellent education, and Monica hoped this might be a means of his more fully reaching God. Augustine ignored his mother's warnings against youthful lusts and pursued a life of self-gratification and immorality while continuing his classical education. He lived with a woman not his wife and fathered a child. Monica didn't have the words to convince her son of the truth of Christianity, but she determined never to stop praying that he would turn to God.

When Augustine went to Italy to teach, Monica, by then a widow, followed him there. In Milan she attended the church pastored by St Ambrose and rejoiced when Augustine was befriended by Bishop Ambrose and eventually became a Christian.

Monica died in 387 at the age of 56. In his Confessions Augustine spoke of his grief and weeping for the mother "now gone from my sight, who for years had wept over me, that I might live in your God's sight, my God." She died a happy woman for she had seen her prayers answered, and both her husband and her son had become believers. Augustine was only 33 at the time of his mother's death, and many years of service to Christ and His church lay before him. In

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (1 Pe 3:1–2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

later years Augustine could look back on his life and recognize the importance of his mother's perseverance in prayer to his own salvation and ministry.

Monica understood what St. Paul emphasized in today's first reading that her son's sanctification was paramount. To that end she lived like a wise virgin, keeping her life open to the working of the Holy Spirit. She understood that it was only the Holy Spirit who could awaken in Augustine the desire on longing for God. She was what had been hidden to him until his 33rd year, the age of his conversion, and he too became like a wise virgin with lamp filled and wicks trimmed.

It was because of Monica's devoted prayer that later in life Augustine could write about the time he was far from the Lord with these poetic words:

“Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.”

Beloved never tire to pray for those in your family today are far from Jesus and the Church for God's will for them and for your is Sanctification. May Monica inspire us to be like the wise virgins, attentive to the Lord's coming in our lives and the lives of those for whom we are praying.