

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time



On August 27, the Church celebrates the Feast of Saint Monica who is known for praying for the conversion of both her son, Augustine, and her husband for several years before they repented and turned to Jesus. Monica was able to maintain peace and a steadfast prayer life during episodes of chaos and confusion in her household, reflecting her trust in God's will.

Rather than concerning herself with others' shortcomings, she set her sights on Jesus and fidelity to His will. She was patient with the response she had gotten from the Lord, waiting 18 years for Augustine's conversion. Moreover, she established boundaries that were suitable to her household, teaching us what it means to take up our cross and follow Jesus—a command heard in this Sunday's Gospel Reading.

Monica met a man named Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. Ambrose had a way of preaching the Word of God that captivated Monica and later Augustine. He was impressed by Monica's faith as she devoted herself to his church. Upon her request, he came to offer a fatherly relationship to Augustine who would later mention how fond he was of the teaching and guidance of Ambrose. Relationships with Ambrose and other fellows in Milan offered a final push toward Augustine's conversion and willingness to profess his faith as a Christian.

Saint Augustine, who is memorialized each year on August 28, struggled with sins of the flesh and compulsive behaviors as a teenager and young man. He was intelligent and gifted, using his talents to achieve earthly success and pleasure. He was also a known womanizer who abused alcohol and drugs.

Thanks to the grace of God, the prayers of Monica, and the counsel of Ambrose, Augustine was baptized and became a Christian. In fact, he is now known as one of the Fathers of the Church. His experience with darkness and the empty nature of addiction gave him the drive to speak boldly of God. In speaking to the Lord, Augustine famously wrote, "You have made us for yourself, o Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

We can be tempted to think that things which bring power, pleasure, honor, and wealth will lead us to happiness and fulfillment. Our experience shows that they simply widen the hole in our hearts and leave us with the illusion of control.

There are a few moments in recovery when we get to express our love and care directly to those closest to us. Augustine recalls a special moment he had with his mother upon his return to the faith:

“We went indoors and told my mother, who was overjoyed. When we related to her how it had happened she was filled with triumphant delight and blessed you, who have power to do more than we ask or understand, for she saw that you had granted her much more in my regard than she had been wont to beg of you in her wretched, tearful groaning. Many years earlier you had shown her a vision of me standing on the rule of faith; and now indeed I stood there, no longer seeking a wife or entertaining any worldly hope, for you had converted me to yourself. In so doing you had also converted her grief into joy far more abundant than she had desired, and much more tender and chaste than she could ever have looked to find in grandchildren from my flesh.”

When we recognize that we are powerless over alcohol and addiction and that our lives had become unmanageable, a miracle often begins to form. We enter a purging period—a *baptism* of sorts—as we rediscover the role of God in our lives.

We follow the terms of our surrender by regularly attending meetings, spending time with peers and mentors (including a sponsor) who can show us new tools, working the Twelve Steps, and sharing the message. Soon, we see that our small steps are accompanied by massive leaps from the Lord. When we get the opportunity to look back, we realize that we could not have found freedom on our own.

Reflection Questions

- How is God asking for your trust and patience today?
- What relationships have brought joy, peace, and direction to your life? Pick one related to recovery and share about it.
- What boundaries and spiritual commitments help you stay rooted in Jesus and your recovery?

Saint Monica Prayer

St. Monica,
I need your prayers.
You know exactly how I'm feeling because you once felt it yourself. I'm hurting, hopeless, and in despair.
I desperately want my [loved one] to return to Christ in his Church but I can't do it alone.
I need God's help.
Please join me in begging the Lord's powerful grace to flow into my [loved one's] life.
Ask the Lord Jesus to soften his heart, prepare a path for his conversion, and activate the Holy Spirit in his life. Amen.

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-9

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

Second Reading: Romans 12:1-2

Gospel: Matthew 16:21-27