

## A Saint for Mother's Day: ST. MONICA

"It is Not Possible that the Child of so Many Tears should Perish"

The greatest power of mothers is the power of GOD'S grace to which they have access through their fervent prayer and shedding of tears for their children. We can see this in the blessed life of ST. MONICA, who is one of the many saints that model for us loving, maternal, intercession before the LORD.

Born around 332 AD in the North African city of Tagaste, ST. MONICA was raised in a well-off Christian family. She was prone to drinking wine as a youth and would sneak down into the family wine cellar and secretly drink. When a family servant called her a "wine-bibber," ST. MONICA gave up the bad habit out of shame. Not long after, she was baptized and began to live an irreproachable life.

Like many of the women in her day, she had an arranged marriage. In her case, it was to a man who struggled with anger and violence. Additionally, he was very critical of Christians and their practices. However, ST. MONICA'S patience, gentleness, and kindness modeled the love of CHRIST for her husband, Patricius, and the year before he died he was baptized. The couple had three children: Navigius, who seems to have been an exemplary son, Augustine, and Perpetua, a daughter, who became a religious. Augustine was wayward and liked to party. When he returned home from school, St. Monica was not going to let him move back home at first, but she relented only after she received a vision of a mysterious figure who told her to cease crying because "Your son is with you."

ST. MONICA related this story to Augustine, and he replied that they might easily be together if she gave up her faith, for that was the main obstacle keeping them apart. Quickly she retorted, "He did not say I was with *you*: he said that you were with *me*." Augustine was impressed by the quick answer and never forgot it. Although his conversion was not to take place for nine long years, ST. MONICA did not lose faith. She continually fasted, prayed, and wept on his behalf. She implored the local bishop for help in winning him over, and he counseled her to be patient, saying, "GOD'S time will come." ST. MONICA persisted in importuning him, and the bishop uttered the words which have often been quoted: "Go now, I beg you; it is not possible that the son of so many tears should perish."

When Augustine moved to Milan with his mistress and illegitimate son, his mother followed, praying for him all the time. In Milan, Augustine met the bishop, ST. AMBROSE, and eventually gave up his loose living and became a Christian. ST. AMBROSE befriended ST. MONICA and had deep respect for her, for she never ceased charitable works and prayer. Her son, for whom she ceaselessly prayed and who wrote about his mother in his famous work *Confessions*, was ST. AUGUSTINE.

ST. MONICA died years later during her family's move back to Tagaste in 387 AD. Before she died, she told her son, "All I wished for was that I might see you Orthodox Christian and a child of Heaven. GOD granted me even more than this in making you despise earthly felicity and consecrate yourself to HIS service." She is commemorated *this* Saturday on May 4<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup>. Holy Mother MONICA, pray to GOD for us!

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