

# MONNICA

## THE LESSON: PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

*“I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.”*  
(2 Timothy 1:12)

During the fourth century the empire underwent a drastic change in attitude towards Christianity. A century that began with persecution ended with the state having adopted Christianity as its official religion – the result of an edict issued in 380. Though Christianity was gaining in popularity during these years, there were many other religions and philosophies all around, as well as false teachings causing confusion and conflict within the Church.

Though it was a turbulent age for believers to navigate, it was also a time during which many great theologians and doctors of the Church were alive; opposing false teachings and providing direction to the faithful – saints like Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, and Augustine of Hippo.

*“And Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”*  
(Luke 18:1)

Monnica lived in a city called Tagaste in what is now Algeria in North Africa. She was born into a Christian household, and while very young had to confront and overcome a tendency to drink too much. Monnica married young and the circumstances of her married life were difficult, but she was a devout Christian and a woman of great prayer. Monnica’s husband was not a Christian. He was a man with a violent temper and a habit of unfaithfulness. Over many years, Monnica prayed for her husband’s conversion, and just before his death her prayers were answered: he became a Christian and was baptized.

*“Pray without ceasing.”*  
(1 Thessalonians 5:17)

At the age of 23, Monnica gave birth to a very gifted son named Augustine. Over the next three decades she would fast and pray fervently for the salvation of her son. Like many mothers before and since, she suffered the heartbreak of watching a beloved child stray from the faith she had taught him and into immoral living. Monnica was not one to give up. She tried refusing to allow Augustine to live in the house. (This didn’t last long). She tried arguing with him. (This lasted a bit longer). But through all her efforts, she *prayed*.

Augustine became an adult and fathered a son of his own (though unmarried). He avoided and was embarrassed by his mother’s persistent concern, and still Monnica did not give up. Augustine went to live in Milan (in Italy) where a great preacher of that time also happened to live. The preacher’s name was Ambrose, and it was ultimately under his teaching that Augustine came to surrender his life to Christ. Monnica was able to see her son baptized at the Easter Vigil in the church at Milan in 387. She felt that with this, her purpose had been accomplished, and her hopes had been realized. Very soon afterwards, she became ill and died.

Many years later, Augustine wrote an autobiography in which he acknowledged the great value of his mother’s persistence and prayers:

“Nevertheless, O God, You ‘stretched out Your hand from above’ and drew my soul out of the profound darkness... because my mother, Your faithful one, wept to You on my behalf... You heard her, O Lord, and did not reject her tears as they poured down and watered the earth under her wherever she prayed. yes, Lord, You truly did heed her prayers.”

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*“Give her of the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her in the gates.”  
(Proverbs 31:31)*

Monnica’s son Augustine became one of the greatest teachers of the Church. Yet at heart she was simply and wonderfully a Christian mother, fervent in prayer for her children to repent and turn to Christ. In both her suffering and in her devotion, she is a relatable example for parents of every place and age.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: SAINT AUGUSTINE, BISHOP OF HIPPO, “CONFESSIONS”, TRANS. E.B. PUSEY | DAVID FARMER, “OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1” | GERARD SAMPSON, “LAYMAN’S BOOK OF SAINTS”.)

## AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON’T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON’T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today’s lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Monnica that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you’ve chosen. Close your time of reflection with a prayer of gratitude for the witness of Monnica.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following collect.

*O God Most High, the creator of all mankind, we bless thy holy Name for the virtue and grace which thou hast given unto holy women in all ages, especially thy servant Monnica; and we pray that the example of her faith and purity, and courage unto death, may inspire many souls in this generation to look unto thee, and to follow thy blessed Son Jesus Christ our Saviour; who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end. Amen.* (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A VIRGIN OR MATRON, P. 316)