

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Monica, Mother of Saint Augustine

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 27

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IN BRIEF

Saint Monica, Mother of Saint Augustine

Mother of Saint Augustine, model for mothers who pray for children who have drifted from the faith.

Feast day	August 27
Born	c. 331, Thagaste (now Souk Ahras, Algeria)
Died	387, Ostia, Italy
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since antiquity)
Era	4th century
Patron saint of	mothers, wives, widows, difficult marriages

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Monica for a Child Who Has Left the Faith

Novena to Saint Monica

Basilica of Sant'Agostino in Rome, Tomb of Saint Monica

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Monica, Mother of Saint Augustine

Saint Monica is the mother of Saint Augustine. A Christian of 4th-century North Africa married to a difficult husband, she prayed for years, with tears, for the conversion of her son, who was finally baptized in Milan in 387. We know her almost entirely through the *Confessions*, in which Augustine draws a portrait of her of rare tenderness. She died at Ostia the same year. Her feast day is August 27, the day before her son's, and she remains the patron saint of mothers who pray for their children.

Who was Saint Monica?

Monica was born around 331 at Thagaste, in Numidia, today Souk Ahras in Algeria, into a Christian family. Augustine tells us that she was raised mainly by an elderly, highly respected servant of the household, who kept strict watch over the children. He also reports a lively anecdote: sent down to the cellar to fetch wine, the young girl got into the habit of drinking a few sips each time, until the day a maid, in the middle of a quarrel, called her a little drunkard. Stung to the quick, Monica corrected herself at once.

Married young to Patricius, a pagan notable of Thagaste, she had at least three children: Augustine, born in 354, Navigius and a daughter whose name the *Confessions* do not give.

Key dates in the life of Saint Monica

- **Around 331**: Born at Thagaste.
- **November 13, 354**: Birth of her son Augustine.

- **Around 371**: Death of her husband Patricius, who had become a Christian shortly before.
- **Around 373**: Augustine joins the Manichaeans; Monica prays and weeps for him.
- **383**: Augustine secretly leaves Carthage for Rome while she prays in a chapel dedicated to Saint Cyprian.
- **Around 385**: She joins her son in Milan.
- **Easter Vigil 387**: Augustine is baptized by Saint Ambrose.
- **Autumn 387**: The vision at Ostia, then her death after a few days of fever, at the age of fifty-six.
- **1430**: Pope Martin V has her relics moved from Ostia to Rome.
- **1945**: A fragment of her ancient epitaph is discovered at Ostia.

A patient wife

Patricius was a kindly man but quick-tempered and unfaithful. Monica never answered him back in his fits of anger; she waited until he had calmed down to explain herself. Augustine relates that the other women of Thagaste, who sometimes bore on their faces the marks of their husbands' blows, were amazed never to see her treated that way. She advised them, with humor, to hold their tongues. By her gentleness she also won over her mother-in-law, who had at first been set against her. She was a peacemaker between people in conflict, repeating to each only what could reconcile them. At the end of his life, Patricius asked for baptism.

The son of so many tears

When Augustine, a brilliant student, joined the Manichaean sect, Monica was devastated. For a time she refused to share her table with him, then had a dream that consoled her: standing on a wooden rule, she saw a young man come toward her who told her that where she was, her son would be too. She

begged a bishop to speak to Augustine. He refused, judging the young man still too proud to listen, then, faced with her insistence and her tears, answered her: "Go, it is impossible that the son of so many tears should perish." Monica received these words as if they had come from heaven.

In 383 Augustine deceived his mother so that he could leave for Rome without her. She eventually followed him to Italy, to Milan. There she discovered Bishop Ambrose, whom she revered and obeyed with simplicity, giving up an African custom of meals at the tombs of the martyrs that he had forbidden. Ambrose, for his part, congratulated Augustine on having such a mother. In 386 her son was converted; at Easter 387 she was present at his baptism.

The vision at Ostia and Monica's death

In the autumn of 387, the little family was waiting at Ostia, the port of Rome, for a ship to Africa. Leaning at a window overlooking a garden, Monica and Augustine spoke together about eternal life. Their conversation rose to a moment of contemplation that Augustine describes in a famous page of the *Confessions* (Book IX, chapter 10). A few days later Monica fell ill. To those who worried that she would die far from her homeland, she replied: "Nothing is far from God." She asked only to be remembered at the altar of the Lord, and she died after nine days of fever, at fifty-six.



The death of Saint Monica at Ostia, fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli in San Gimignano (15th century).

She was buried at Ostia. In 1430 Pope Martin V had her remains moved to Rome, where they rest today in the Basilica of Sant'Agostino. In 1945, children playing near the Church of Saint Aurea at Ostia uncovered a fragment of her epitaph, composed in the early 5th century and already known from medieval copies.

Why is Saint Monica the patron saint of mothers?

Monica is the patron of mothers, and especially of mothers whose children have drifted away from the faith, because she did not give up on her son. She did not convert him by speeches, but by stubborn prayer, a consistent life and a love that never quit. She is also a patron of wives and of difficult marriages, because of her patience with Patricius, and of widows, having lived the last sixteen years of her life as one.

Monica is the saint of perseverance. Her example speaks to all parents worried about their children, to wives going through trials and to everyone who has waited a long time for God's answer. She also shows that we must sometimes know how to keep silent and let God act in his own time. Her name is familiar far beyond the Church: the city of Santa Monica, in California, bears it.

To pray with her, use the prayer to Saint Monica for a child who has left the faith, or follow the novena to Saint Monica from August 18 to August 26, the eve of her feast.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Monica in art

- **The dark veil and clothing of a widow**, often in black.
- **Hands joined in prayer**, sometimes with tears on her face.
- **Her son Augustine** beside her, especially in the scene at the window of Ostia.

Where to pray to Saint Monica

- **Rome**: the Basilica of Sant'Agostino, near Piazza Navona, which holds her tomb.
- **Ostia** (Italy): the Church of Saint Aurea, in the medieval village, near the place of her death and first burial.
- **Pavia**: the Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, where she can be prayed to at the tomb of her son.
- **Annaba** (Algeria): the Basilica of Saint Augustine, above the ruins of Hippo.



The Basilica of Sant'Agostino in Rome, where Saint Monica rests.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Monica for a Child Who Has Left the Faith

Saint Monica left no writings. Her words have come down to us through her son, Saint Augustine, who records them in the *Confessions*, written around the year 400. Below you will find her last words at Ostia, the saying of a bishop who comforted her, and then an original prayer to entrust a child or a loved one to Saint Monica.

The last words of Monica (Confessions IX, 11)

At Ostia, in the autumn of 387, Monica felt death approaching. Her sons were sorry that she could not be buried in her homeland, beside her husband. Translation from the Latin by Saintspedia; the original text is in the public domain.

> *"Lay this body anywhere; do not let concern for it trouble you. I ask only one thing of you: wherever you may be, remember me at the altar of the Lord."*
>
> *And when she was asked whether she was not afraid to leave her body so far from her own city: "Nothing is far from God, and there is no fear that at the end of time he will not know the place from which to raise me up."*

Source: Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IX, chapter 11.

"The son of so many tears" (Confessions III, 12)

Years earlier, Monica had begged a bishop, in tears, to speak to her son, then a Manichaean. Wearied by her insistence, he answered her:

> *"Go away now. As surely as you live, it is impossible that the son of such tears should perish."*

Source: Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book III, chapter 12. Augustine adds that his mother received these words as if they had come from heaven.

Prayer to Saint Monica for a child who has left the faith

> *Saint Monica, mother of Saint Augustine, you prayed and wept for so many years for your son: pray for me.*
>
> *I entrust to you my child (or this loved one), who has drifted away from God: (say the name). You know what it is like to watch someone you love take a road that frightens you. Keep me from bitterness, from useless reproaches and from discouragement.*
>
> *Teach me your patience: to know when to keep silent, when to speak, and above all to keep on praying. Help me to live my faith in such a way that it is a sign for them, not a burden.*
>
> *Your prayer was answered beyond all your hopes: obtain for me the trust that God acts in his own time, and that nothing is far from him. Amen.*

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Monica is celebrated on August 27, the day before Saint Augustine (August 28), so the two can be prayed to together. Turn to her at any time for a son or daughter, a spouse or a loved one who has left the Church or stopped believing, for a marriage going through a hard time, or when you have been

waiting a long time for an answer from God. Many parents pray this prayer daily, for months or years, as Monica did. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Monica from August 18 to August 26.

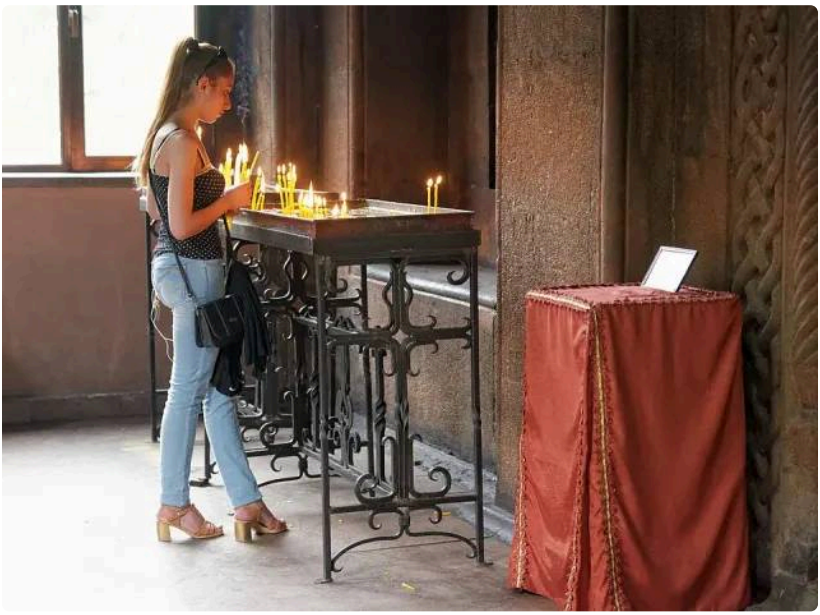
NOVENA

Novena to Saint Monica

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Monica as Saint Augustine tells it in the *Confessions*. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast, begin on August 18; it ends on August 26, the day before her feast on August 27. It can also be prayed at any time of year for a child or loved one who is far from God.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust to God the person you are praying for, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day and then an Our Father and a Hail Mary. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day.



Lighting a candle and praying with Saint Monica.

Day 1: A faith received

Monica grew up in a Christian family, raised by a demanding and devout old servant. Faith is often handed on by humble people. We rarely know the names of those who first taught the saints to pray, but God knows them.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who handed on the faith to me. Make me in turn a witness for those who come after me.

Today: Pray for the person who first made God known to you.

Day 2: Correcting oneself

As a girl, Monica used to sip wine in secret. A hurtful remark from a maid opened her eyes, and she corrected herself at once. Even a harsh word can become a grace when we let it show us the truth.

Prayer: Lord, give me the humility to accept fair criticism and to change what needs to change.

Today: Give up a small habit that does not help you live better.

Day 3: Gentleness in marriage

Faced with a quick-tempered husband, Monica did not answer in anger; she waited for the right moment to speak. Her patience eventually transformed Patricius, who asked for baptism before he died.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust my home to you. Teach us to speak to one another gently and never to let anger have the last word.

Today: Hold back a sharp reply and choose a calm moment to talk things through.

Day 4: Making peace

Augustine tells us that his mother never repeated the harsh words she heard on either side, but only what could bring people together. Her discretion healed quarrels that gossip would have made worse.

Prayer: Lord, make me a peacemaker in my family and among those around me.

Today: Refuse to pass on a criticism, and say instead a word that brings people closer.

Day 5: Tears

Monica wept for her son, Augustine says, more than mothers weep for their dead children. Her tears were a prayer. God does not despise the tears of those who love; he gathers them.

Prayer: Lord, gather up my tears for those I love. I entrust to you especially: (name the person).

Today: Spend some time in silent prayer for this person, before the Blessed Sacrament if possible.

Day 6: A word of hope

"It is impossible that the son of so many tears should perish." Monica held on to these words of a bishop for years. When nothing seemed to change, she remembered them and kept praying.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen my hope. May I never stop believing that you can touch the heart of the one I am praying for.

Today: Write down a verse of Scripture that sustains your hope, and keep it with you.

Day 7: Letting go

Augustine left for Rome in secret. Monica could not stop him; she kept on praying, and later joined him. To love sometimes means accepting that we are no longer in control. Our children and loved ones belong first to God, who loves them even more than we do.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands those I can no longer protect. Watch over them where I cannot go.

Today: Send a kind message, without any reproach, to a child or loved one who is far away.

Day 8: The joy of an answered prayer

At Easter 387, Monica saw her son baptized by Ambrose. God had answered, in a different and far greater way than she had imagined: the son she had wept over would become a bishop and one of the greatest teachers of the Church.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for the prayers you have already answered in my life, even those I did not notice.

Today: Write down three graces you have received in recent years.

Day 9: Nothing is far from God

At Ostia, Monica died in peace. She asked for only one thing: to be remembered at the altar of the Lord. Her long years of waiting ended in trust. She no longer worried about where she would be buried, because she knew whom she was going to meet.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place in your hands the one for whom I have prayed. Through the intercession of Saint Monica, bring them back to you, and keep me in trust. Amen.

Today: Have a Mass offered for this person's intentions, or attend Mass and pray for them there.

Closing prayer

Saint Monica, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you once more those I love who are far from God. Pray for them and for me. Obtain for me your patience, your gentleness and your perseverance, and the certainty that nothing is far from God. Amen.

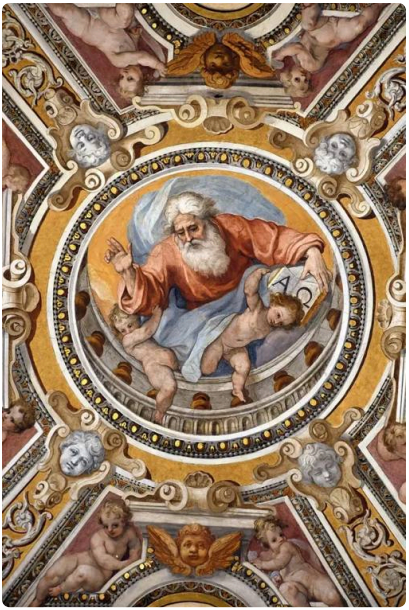
PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Sant'Agostino in Rome, Tomb of Saint Monica

The Basilica of Sant'Agostino, in the heart of Rome, a short walk from Piazza Navona, has housed the tomb of Saint Monica since the 15th century. Entrusted to the Augustinians, it is the main pilgrimage site dedicated to the mother of Saint Augustine, and one of the richest churches in Rome in works of art.

From Ostia to Rome: the history of the relics

Monica died at Ostia in 387 and was buried there. Her tomb was venerated there for centuries. In 1430, Pope Martin V had her remains transferred to Rome, where they were entrusted to the Augustinians. A few decades later, beginning in 1479, the present basilica was built thanks to Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville. Its Renaissance travertine facade is one of the first of that style in Rome. The saint's relics rest there in a chapel dedicated to her, near the choir.



Basilica of Sant'Agostino in Rome, tomb of Saint Monica.

A basilica for mothers

For centuries, mothers have come to Sant'Agostino to entrust their children to Saint Monica. Near the entrance, the statue of the *Madonna del Parto*, sculpted by Jacopo Sansovino in the 16th century, is surrounded by ex-votos left by expectant women and families. The place thus keeps a particular vocation: the prayer of parents.

The masterpieces of Sant'Agostino

The basilica houses Caravaggio's *Madonna of the Pilgrims* (or *Madonna di Loreto*), painted around 1604-1606: the Virgin, standing on the threshold of a house, presents the Child to two kneeling pilgrims with bare, dirty feet. You can also see, on a pillar of the nave, the prophet Isaiah painted in fresco by Raphael in 1512. These works make the visit a true path of meditation.

Praying at the tomb of Saint Monica

Before your visit, you may reread the life of Saint Monica, or chapters 10 and 11 of Book IX of the *Confessions*. Before her tomb, a time of silence lets you entrust by name a child or loved one far from the faith. The prayer to Saint Monica for a child suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia for a personal visit.

Other places of Saint Monica

- **Ostia** (Italy): the medieval village and the Church of Sant'Aurea, near where a fragment of her epitaph was found in 1945; the nearby ancient site of Ostia Antica evokes the port where she died.
- **Pavia**: the Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, tomb of her son Saint Augustine.
- **Milan**: the Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, a reminder of the bishop she revered and of Augustine's baptism.
- **San Gimignano** (Tuscany): the Church of Sant'Agostino and the frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli that tell the life of Augustine and his mother.
- **Souk Ahras** (Algeria): ancient Thagaste, her native town.

Practical information

The Basilica of Sant'Agostino is in the historic center of Rome, between Piazza Navona and the Pantheon, on the square that bears its name. It is easily reached on foot. On August 27, the feast of Saint Monica, and August 28, the feast of Saint Augustine, special celebrations are held. Check Mass and visiting times with the Augustinian community before you come.

Credits and sources

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