

## **The Power of a Mother's Prayers - St. Monica & St. Augustine**

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Hi everyone and welcome. My name is Mary Lenaburg. I'm a wife, a mom, an author, speaker, and I am so excited to spend the next couple of weeks with you, discussing some great topics. Today, we're going to talk specifically about a mother-son relationship. We're going to talk about St. Monica and her son St. Augustine. Now, it's not going to be a biographical sketch. We're going to talk about some characteristics that existed in both of them. And we're also going to talk about the power of a mother's prayers and her actions that really, we're the power behind Augustine's conversion. But first, we're going to ask the Holy Spirit into this conversation as I always do. And we are going to say the "Come Holy Spirit Prayer". So, join me, won't you?

### **Opening Prayer**

In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. Oh God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, Grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever enjoy his consolations through Christ, our Lord, Amen. In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

### **St. Augustine and St. Monica**

So, a little background, just a little bit, just a little bit on St. Augustine and St. Monica. So, they lived during the 4th century and St. Monica was married to a politician of the day and he was a rather raucous gentleman. I don't know if I pronounced that word on time, but he was a rake, right? He was a drunkard. He abused her physically, emotionally. He was not a Christian and Monica herself had her own journey in all of this. And her journey included like she herself abused alcohol and here she has this son, and she has a conversion to the Lord. And she's like, "I need to get Augustine", you know, "right". I need to get my husband right. And there were three things that I look to in St. Monica and they existed in St. Augustine as well because his mother taught them to him, that I really want to talk about, okay? And I want to kind of leave you with these three things as kind of Power Points in your own prayer life.

Patience, persistence, and piety. These are what define St. Monica as she took her frustrations straight to the Lord, right? She followed Augustine as he continued his sinful life. She didn't just let it lie. She went after it and she kept going to St. Ambrose, who was part of Augustine's conversion. And for almost 17 years, 17 years, patience, right? Perseverance and piety. Saint Augustine had that moment in the garden where he opens the Lord's word. And it says, "*Take up and read, take up and read this word and come to know Me better.*" Augustine's life was changed by that moment in the garden, but it was changed, you know over the process of that 17 years. Monica loved him unconditionally, right? She loved him unconditionally. Even through his sinful life, he had a son out of wedlock, and she was a model of devotion to him. And she's a

model for us as mothers, whether we are mothers of our physical bodies or spiritual mothers, but those that God brings into our life for us to care for and mother. She is a model for us to never ever give up.

## **Patience a Mortal Virtue**

So, let's talk about those three points, shall we? And what the church says they are. So, patience. Patience is a form of a mortal virtue, a fortitude, right? So, patience comes from fortitude. It enables one to endure present evils without sadness, or resentment, or conformity to that evil. Let's break that down a little bit, right? Fortitude, it comes from fortitude, and it allows you to endure without sadness, or resentment, or conforming to the evil, right? Patience is mainly concerned with bearing the difficulties without interior complaint, to use hardships to make progress in that virtue. And even to desire the cross and afflictions out of love of God and accept them with spiritual joy.

When was the last time you thought about patience as spiritual joy? When I was doing research for this talk, that really was like this red light, "Mary pay attention, 'patience', that thing that you never ever pray for, because it just drives you nuts to be patient." It's spiritual joy. Ooh. I've been sitting with that for a while. So, patience comes from the Latin word, "patientia". I didn't do well in Latin, y'all. I tried, but it means "suffering". All right? It means to suffer. Isn't that what patience is? That's what it is to me. I feel like I'm suffering, right? Trying to be patient.

But now I know, look at St. Monica. Look how patient she was, for 17 years, right? She was patient. She suffered, she did not conform. She did not give in. She remained a woman of great fortitude. And she persevered which is where we're going to go next.

## **Perseverance, suffering with Joy**

She was persistent, right? Persistent, to persevere. So, most dictionaries define perseverance with this, like a steadfastness and doing something despite the difficulty, right? Or delay in achieving success. But we as Catholics, look through a Catholic lens at everything. So that "something", that steadfastness in something, right? Is we're doing, we are living out the call of God in our life. St. Monica was living out the call of God in her life. She didn't know if she would have success in earthly terms. She just knew that her son's soul was in danger. And so, she was persistent. She was, she persevered in action, right?

Look at what she did! She wrote letters, she showed up when he was off doing something, she would show up. And she'd be like, "What are you doing?" And he'd be like, "Uh, not anything you need to know about.", right? And she was persistent. She persevered through so much, 17 years. With her own husband, she persevered to the point where he converted a year before his death. She persevered. She didn't give up. She didn't conform, right? She was patient. She bore much difficulty suffered with joy. And here is Augustine. She wrote to St. Ambrose.

She wrote to bishops. She kept saying, "Meet with him, see him, guide him, talk to him." She took that perseverance and put it into physical action, right? She fasted, she prayed, and she

showed up. With each struggle, with each struggle or difficulty, it is possible to achieve the seemingly impossible because nothing is impossible with God. St. Monica's proof of that. Nothing is impossible with God.

## **Piety**

So, let's look at this final piece. This final piece of piety, right? Piety, St. Monica showed great piety. And in the end, so did Augustine, as he came together with St. Ambrose and St. Ambrose walked him through his conversion, his entrance into the church, right? Both St. Ambrose and St. Augustine are doctors of the church. We have this beautiful work, "The City of God", St. Augustine's "Confessions", where he wrote so beautifully about his mother, Monica, where he told of her persistence and her patience, and that he wouldn't be where he was without her. He needed her. And she needed him. Remember she was dealing with her own issues. She was dealing with alcoholism. She was trying desperately to fight her own demons. And she constantly brought those before the Lord. She knew her weakness. She knew she couldn't do anything without God. And so, she continued to earnestly come before the Lord, ask for forgiveness and to be persistent, and to be patient with herself, and to be patient with the situation, and to surrender it to the Lord, and allow Him to work in her own weakness.

And this is where her piety shows up. Piety, Saint Gregory the Great, in demonstrating the relationship among this gift of piety, says "Through the fear of the Lord," what is "Fear of the Lord"? Fear of the Lord, it's not, I'm afraid of the Lord, right? It's not, I'm afraid. I'm fearful. It's in awe of the Lord. We are to be in awe of the Lord, so much so that we do not wish to offend Him. That's what fear of the Lord means. And that's part of piety. And then, "From piety", St. Gregory The Great says, "comes knowledge". And this knowledge is the filial respect for God, right? The familial relationship with God, a generous love toward Him and an affectionate obedience that wants to do what He commands, because we love the One who commands us. It is our over-abundance of love for God and fearfulness that we would offend Him in any way and disrupt our relationship with Him in any way. And so, we remain pious, we remain in a state of grace. We remain in a submissive relationship with Him.

Submissive, what does it mean? It means under his mission. I remain under the Lord's mission because I am in awe of Him. Both St. Augustine and St. Monica showed great piety toward the Lord. Now, St. Augustine took the long road home, right? He's famous for saying, "Lord, make me chaste, just not yet.", okay? He was an alcoholic. He, he was, you know, sleeping with prostitutes. Like I said, he had a son out of wedlock. He was not living the Christian life. He was all into what the culture said was great. All about sexual sin and the passions, he was all in. And how did God speak to Him? He spoke to Him through his intellect. He spoke to him through that filial relationship of "I love you so much, Augustine. I want more for you. I want better for you."

And Augustine knew of that filial relationship because of the relationship he had with his mother. I mean, his mother was a pain in his backside, and he spoke very honestly about that woman would show up and ruin things until he was ready to submit his life to the Lord. And it was because of her persistence, her own weakness, you know? It was through her own journey of healing, where she learned that piety, that patience, that perseverance, that persistence with the

Lord. And she was able to then turn that around and love her son so fully and so completely, that she never once gave a thought to quitting.

## **Story about my son**

So, for you mamas out there, I know for me, this story of this mother and this son entered quite powerfully for me when my son was in college. Many of you know my story. You know that my husband and I, we've been married for more than 30 years now. We were blessed with four souls, two, that we did not get to meet, we lost to miscarriage. And two, we did. Our son, Jonathan who's now married and living a beautiful life. And our daughter, Courtney, who had a seizure disorder, and severe special needs, was wheelchair-bound, non-verbal for the 22 years that she lived this side of heaven.

And we were in constant crisis with Courtney. And when you have a child who's in constant crisis, then if there are other children to be loved, a lot of the times they feel set aside. They don't get the attention that they deserve because you're going to the weakest link. You're going to care for the one who can't care for themselves. And as a mother, I really struggled with that. And when our son was in college, I've written about this in my book, "Be brave in The Scared" we had a time where he really was able to confront those emotions and say to us quite honestly, "You don't love me as much as you love my sister." And our family went through a series of about five years, where we really had to wrestle with the damage that had been done on the relationships due to neglect and ignorance on my part. And we had to come to our son, and I prayed so hard. I fasted; I took action. I brought him a great therapist and we've, spiritual direction and surrounded him with good people to walk him through this desolate time of confusion, and doubt, and anger, and depression, and anxiety.

And by the grace of God, and the persistence and the perseverance that St. Monica taught me in her own story, he came to a place of full and complete healing with the Lord and with our family. And now, I look at this man who is fearfully and wonderfully made, and that he loves the Lord, and I cannot wait, praise God, please, Lord, when he is blessed with children of his own, that he will fight for them as his parents fought for him. And I learned that from St. Monica. I learned that from her story. I learned that from her tenaciousness and the fact that she just never conformed, and she never quit. And she didn't care what the culture said. I didn't care what the culture said. This was my kid. And we were going to do everything we could to make sure he was able to live his very best life. To love God, to honor Him with his life.

## **A Relationship that stood on Faith**

St. Augustine, look who he became. We look to him in so many places in the church, that beautiful prayer, "My heart is restless Lord, until it rests in You", We come to understand that restlessness in our life because of the wisdom He left us. So, this relationship from the 4th century, this beautiful mother-son relationship, this hard relationship, this tenacious relationship, right? But one that stood on faith, stood on purpose, stood on determination and fortitude. And now here we are hundreds of years later, and we have this beautiful example. We have these two saints to go to in times of trouble within our own families. When someone needs Monica's tenaciousness, I know I can call on her and say, "I cannot conform. I cannot give up. I must

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persist. I need you to persist with me." And she does. And when we go to St. Augustine with our children and their chastity, with our children in their moral fiber, "Lord, bring me St. Augustine. 'St. Augustine come and step in for my son or my daughter. You walked this path, and yet you saw God. You heard His voice, and you answered the call He placed upon your heart. Please assist my child in that.'"

Ahh! The saints give us so much beauty to glean onto. So, be St. Monica, be St. Augustine. Persist, persevere, be a person of piety and patience, suffer with joy. Because what the Lord has in store for you is greater than you can ever imagine. Ask me how I know. Thank you for joining me today, guys. Look up the life of St. Monica and St. Augustine. You will be blessed by their story.