



Dolorosa

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

AUGUST 2018

THE PERFECT EFFORT



Father Paul Krug, C.S.P.V

Catholics from all walks of life, especially Catholic wives and mothers, are familiar in one way or another with Saint Monica. Indeed, I would venture to say that Saint

Monica is one of the most well-known and loved Saints on the Church calendar. She is so loved because her life is proof that no matter how far away from the Faith one's spouse or child has fallen, no matter how unkind and uncompassionate one's spouse may be, no matter how many difficulties and sorrows one may face in life, there is always hope—hope that God will hear one's prayers and grant the grace and strength necessary to surmount such obstacles.

Saint Monica was born in the early part of the fourth century. As a young woman, she married a Roman official named Patricius. Her marriage, however, was anything but happy. Patricius was a pagan. He was unrestrained in his excesses, unfaithful to his wife, and quick to violence and anger. Saint Monica, on the other hand, was a devout Christian

who remained faithful to her husband in spite of his harshness and sinful ways. She, consequently, had much to suffer in her marriage. Eventually, because of her many prayers and sacrifices, as well as the tears

she shed quietly for Patricius, Saint Monica obtained the grace of his conversion before he died.

On November 13, 354, a son was born to Monica and Patricius whom they called Augustine. Patricius refused to allow Monica to have him baptized, but he did permit her to teach the young Augustine about Christianity. Thus, in the midst of the many trials and sorrows of her married life, Monica strove to raise Augustine as a Christian and instill in him the one, true Faith and the Christian virtues.

However, as he grew older, Augustine came to ignore the good influence of his mother.

Since Augustine was such a brilliant and talented student, Patricius decided to give him the best education he could. He, therefore, sent his sixteen-year-old son to study in the city of Carthage,

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which is was located in modern Tunisia. There, on account of bad influences, Augustine fell into a very sinful way of life. As often happens, his loss of morals was soon followed by the destruction of his Faith, and this broke his mother's heart. Saint Monica, like the Sorrowful Mother, was pierced with a sword of sorrow.

Throughout this time, Saint Monica made many attempts to bring her son back to the Faith and to the love of God. By her motherly affection and sound Catholic teaching, she sought his conversion, but he would not listen. In fact, he bluntly refused to hear his mother's pleas. Despite this—despite the fact that from a natural point of view the situation looked bleak—Saint Monica would not give up on her son. The more Augustine refused to listen to her, the more she refused to give up or despair of his salvation. She stormed heaven with prayers and with confidence in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She implored the Mother of God and her Divine Son to convert her son from his sinful life and his heretical beliefs.

Augustine continued to resist, but the prayers of a mother are very powerful, and the tears of a mother cannot but touch the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Our Divine Savior and His Blessed Mother felt Monica's sorrow and anguish as Augustine moved further and further away from her. So, moved by love and compassion for Saint Monica, the Blessed Virgin Mary went to offer her hope and consolation.

One day, “according to an old tradition,” as the 1908 edition of the Catholic Encyclopedia tells us in the article “Confraternities of the Cord”:

Saint Monica in a vision received a black leather belt from the Blessed Virgin, who assured the holy widow that she would take under her special protection all those who wore it in her honor.

Our Lady appeared to Monica wearing a black leather belt or cincture and holding the Child Jesus in her arms. After offering Saint Monica some words of comfort and consolation, the Blessed Virgin removed the cincture and handed it to Saint Monica. Our Lady gave it to her as a continual reminder that she, the Mother of Consolation, would always be there to strengthen and console Saint Monica in all her trials and sorrows.

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Saint Monica was deeply consoled by Our Lady's words, and from that moment on she wore the cincture and persevered in praying for her son's conversion with renewed vigor. In time Augustine did amend his life and convert. Before her holy death, Saint Monica gave her son the black leather cincture that had been bestowed upon her by Our Lady. Saint Augustine later made it part of the habit of the Augustinian Order in remembrance of the promise of Our Lady of Consolation: that she would take under her special protection all those who wore the black leather belt in her honor. In fact, the Blessed Virgin under her title of Our Lady of Consolation is one of the patrons of Augustinians. Her feast day, as Father Thomas Flynn, C.C., tells us in *Sermons on Our Blessed Lady*, is the Sunday after the Feast of Saint Augustine, which is August 28 (166).

After his mother's death, Saint Augustine acknowledged that it was because of her that he became the person he did. This is what he wrote, as related by Lady Elizabeth Herbert in *The Mother of Saint Augustine: The Life of Saint Monica*:

It is to my mother that I owe all. If I am thy child, O my God, it is because Thou gavest me such a mother.



Painting of Our Lady of Consolation Presenting the Black Belt to Saint Monica and Saint Augustine
On Display in Our Lady of Consolation Church, Nagasaki, Japan.



Icon of della Consolata, Turin

It is because of the long faithful tears with which she pleaded for me [that] I did not long ago perish in sin and misery. (112-113)

“It is to my mother that I owe all. If I am thy child, O my God, it is because Thou gavest me such a mother.”

Throughout the course of our lives, we will know hardship and sorrow as Saint Monica did. Perhaps some will even know the pain and anguish of a wayward spouse, child, or relative. Whatever that sorrow or trial may be, we must always remember that Our Blessed Mother is our hope and consolation. She is the Mother of Consolation and the Comforter of the Afflicted, and she will reach out to us, as she reached out to Saint Monica, if we call upon her. Of course, she probably will not appear to us as she did to Saint Monica, but she will certainly give us the grace and strength we need to persevere in the midst of our sorrows and sufferings; she will help us to carry our crosses.

As we traverse this valley of tears then, let us always recommend ourselves to Our Lady of Consolation, putting our confidence in her maternal compassion and solicitude. As we do this, let us also be ever mindful that we will meet others who are burdened with anguish and difficulty. Our relatives, friends, and even complete strangers will have their share of tribulation and grief in this world. We must be ever ready, then, to imitate Our Blessed Mother and seek to be a source of consolation to our neighbor when he is weighed down by sadness and hardship. We must have the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi ever on our lips: “O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console.”



To “console” means to alleviate or lessen the grief, sorrow, or disappointment of another. This often requires something called “empathy.” Very simply, empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. In other words, we put ourselves, so to speak, in another’s shoes. This is what Our Lady did in Saint Monica’s case. Our Lady, the Sorrowful Mother, truly felt the anguish of Saint Monica, who was herself a sorrowing mother. Experiencing this sorrow in an empathetic way, the Blessed Virgin was moved to do what she could to alleviate Monica’s grief. So it must be with us, too.

As we go on striving to give a perfect effort in imitating Our Blessed Mother, let us not fail to emulate her empathy and seek to console others who are struggling. If we see our neighbor—especially a fellow Catholic—having a difficult time, we should strive to be there for him. It is quite amazing how a word of inspiration, an expression of kindness, or even an encouraging smile can change someone’s day—perhaps even someone’s life. It is true, sometimes nothing can be said, but at such times an understanding silence can go a long way in helping someone through his difficulty.

We may never know in this world how we have affected people; it is something we will know only in eternity. But how glorious will that day be when we again meet those we have influenced and encouraged in this life! How joyous will that moment be to hear those select people thank us and say to us, “It is because of you that I persevered; it is because of you that I did not give up.”

Until that day comes, however, we can be sure that we will effect much good for our struggling brethren by our efforts to console and comfort them. This does not mean that we seek to console others from a purely natural, humanistic point of view; rather, we do it ultimately for the love of God, Who commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves for His sake. Furthermore, we do it because consoling, encouraging, and inspiring others is what the Sacred Hearts of Jesus of Mary would do and have done down through the centuries. It is something, however, that very sadly is lost in today’s self-centered society—a society in which people, for the most part,

are concerned only with themselves.

Let us, then, be the selfless ones that this world desperately needs. Knowing well that we are all in this together, let us strive to help one another and encourage one another in our struggles.

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May Our Lady of Consolation be our comfort in times of trial. May she be an inspiration in our endeavor to console others. And may the inspiring prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi ever be our guide:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.