Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Spirituality



"Saint Augustine and Saint Monica," 17th century painting by Gioacchino Assereto (Wikimedia Commons/Minneapolis Institute of Arts)



by Sr. Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan (Nguyen)

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

September 1, 2023

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

In Asian culture, the roles of women are often diminished. Because of this, women sometimes face a lack of recognition. As a result, women themselves might develop self-deprecating tendencies, restricting themselves to roles such as domestic market workers, cooking rice dishes, and taking care of smaller tasks in the house.

Every year on Aug. 27, the liturgical church honors St. Monica, celebrating her remarkable ability to perform extraordinary things through ordinary actions. St. Monica embodies the female role of: "gentle as a willow yet string as silk." Her lifestyle displays a deeply determined wife and mother, who was always steadfast in her faith in God and constantly prayed amid all the trials of her family life.

St. Monica was born into a family that valued morals, love for neighbors and care of the poor. Ordinary people are often faced with difficulties, a notion exemplified by the trials faced by individuals like Job, who faced many struggles despite leading a holy life. In the same way, St. Joseph was a righteous man, but he also encountered his own challenges. St. Monica also fits this same pattern.

At the age of 22, in obedience to her parents' wishes, she married Patricius, a nobleman with a cruel disposition, and many years her senior. Despite these obstacles, she accepted the will of her parents.

Advertisement

Faced with suffering due to her husband and her mother-in-law, she silently prayed for them, believing that her faith could save their souls and lead them to God. Her courage, humility and unwavering faith in God eventually convinced both her husband and her mother-in-law to embrace the Christian faith. Later, she gave birth to three children, with Augustine being the oldest. Although initially characterized by pleasure, playfulness, pride and fame, Augustine's transformation into a revered saint in the church has been attributed to St. Monica's sincere tears and constant prayers.

The image of St. Monica persists as a courageous holy mother, considered as a patroness of Catholic wives and mothers. She exemplifies the roles of daughter-in-law, wife and mother. St. Monica's persistent prayer life helped her to endure the difficult hardships of family life with patience and complete trust in God. Gradually

she won the sympathy of her mother-in-law and persuaded her husband, Patricius, to return to the Christian faith.

As for Augustine, her son's tumultuous life many times brought her humiliation. Yet St. Monica persevered in praying for her son, serving as a shining example for Catholic mothers. Her patient devotion to God, and her kind heart contributed to a peaceful and happy family.



Catholic women of the Xuan Loc Diocese celebrate the feast of St. Monica. (Courtesy of Joseph The Tai, media group of the Xuan Loc Diocese)

The inspirational life of St. Monica was adopted by Catholic women within the Xuan Loc Diocese as their patron saint. Every year they gather at Xuan Loc Cathedral to offer Mass to celebrate her feast day and also to learn about family life. These gatherings aim to promote the preservation of family happiness and the effective Christian education of children. During these meetings, some Catholic mothers openly share the difficulties and sufferings of family life, requesting additional prayers from the community.

A Catholic mother from Tan Xuan Parish within the Xuan Loc Diocese shared her experience from 20 years ago. She and her husband were once consumed by business and rarely went to Mass, even though their house was very near the parish. Her family encountered many difficulties with her children's lack of obedience. After being sick for a week, she turned to God and started attending Mass. During her visits, she saw a neighbor, who was equally poor, but who attended daily Mass with

her children. What she witnessed prompted her to start taking her own children to daily Mass. She also joined the Catholic mothers' group at her parish, learning many lessons from the life of St. Monica. As a result, she initiated family activities such as reciting the rosary, reading the Scriptures, and praying together every night.

Today, she is grateful for the peacefulness that surrounds her family and the improvement in the behavior of her children. She shares her experience as an extension of her gratitude to God and adds prayers for her family so that difficulties do not return to her family life.

Another Catholic mother, age 65 with two daughters who became Dominican nuns, shared her story from over 10 years ago. She was very distressed due to her husband's alcoholism. He would drink excessively, forcing her to stay awake all night, listening to him curse. Thanks to her participation in the Catholic mothers' group of the parish she began to pray along with her Dominican daughters through the intercession of St. Monica for her husband. She now shares this story to express gratitude for her husband's sobriety, celebrating their daily attendance to Mass. Her family environment has become more peaceful.

On the occasion of the feast of St. Monica, patroness of Catholic mothers and wives of the Xuan Loc Diocese, may God give Catholic women the strength to embrace their roles as mothers fully. May they embody gentleness as wives within their families and work to fulfill God's will, contributing to a better, more loving society. May all Catholic mothers in the diocese become like St. Monica, persevering in prayer, fervently serving God and their families, and caring for their children's education to become witnesses of faith in the midst of society and today's world.