Columns
Spirituality



St. Augustine and St. Monica, his mother, by Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1649) (Artvee)



by Robancy A. Helen

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> "O love, which always burns, and is never extinguished, true charity! My God set me all on fire."
> —St. Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430)

My childhood was filled with beautiful memories of getting to know the Bible, the saints and the church. An introvert and timid by nature, I do not remember talking much to people, playing with friends or spending time with family. However, I recall spending a lot of my time reading. Back then, we were not exposed to newspapers, as they were only available at school. There were no mobile phones, electronic gadgets or even television sets at home.

During a school holiday, when my mother was busy with household chores, I found myself in the attic, not knowing what to do. I saw an old cardboard box filled with antiques. Out of curiosity, I took things out one by one, looking for something interesting. I found an old book written in Tamil, the official language of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The book was quite old. But I was drawn to delve into it. The book was about the life of St. John of God. That was the moment when my personal reading journey began. I was 9.

In one sitting, I finished reading it and felt quite happy. When I went downstairs, I asked about the book. It turned out to be my aunt's book. She had been awarded it for scoring the highest mark on the diocesan-level catechism examination. Since then, I have developed a love for reading the lives of Catholic saints. However, it was a challenge to find books about saints in those days, and they were mainly available to the nuns, the Sisters of the Mother of Sorrows and the Servants of Mary. Despite the difficulty, I managed to learn about many saints.

When I joined the convent in 2005, I read many books on the lives of the saints, including St. Augustine of Hippo. My superior gave me *Confessions of St. Augustine*, the world's most renowned autobiography, memorializing his deep repentance. His past kept him humble, which is revealed in his prayer: "Take my heart, O Lord, for I cannot give it to you! Keep my heart, for I cannot keep it for you! Send me any cross that will keep me subject to your Cross and save me despite myself!"

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His life intrigues me, giving me hope that God's love is infinite and his forgiveness cannot be measured by any other relationship in the world. God deliberately chose hardened sinners to prove His love for humanity and all his creation. Because of his unfailing love, we can rise from our failings, take up our cross, and follow Christ.

St. Augustine's life provides a clear example of how God the Father is kind and gentle. He chooses people from all walks of life. The Catholic Church honors the lives of saints from different backgrounds, including physicians, educators, social activists, kings, queens, politicians and enslaved people. This demonstrates the universality of Christianity, allowing fresh perspectives to come into our hearts and to help us get up after we have fallen.

A theologian and a philosopher, St. Augustine stands as one of the world's greatest thinkers. He is also an outstanding father of the Catholic Church. St. Monica, his mother, spent years praying for the conversion of her beloved son. She followed him from place to place, awaiting his repentance and transformation. She even implored St. Ambrose, a revered bishop, to speak to St. Augustine. God used St. Monica to shape a great saint for the church. Her tears and sacrifices became gifts from her son Augustine to the church.

The life of St. Augustine is a gift to the church, as are his teachings and writings, which are still widely read. St. Augustine is a great example for all those who try to run away from God. From him, we learn that we cannot escape or run away if God chooses us for His mission. If we align ourselves with God's plan, He will work wonders in our lives. Our God is the one who gathers the workers for His vineyard, and there is no need to fear his call. By listening to Him and following Him, we will be led onto a holy path where we will never be lost.

May the life of St. Augustine and his mother, St. Monica, guide us to choose the right path — one that is holy and pleasing to God. Then the world can say about each one of us, "What a pleasant happiness to see a saint, to be with the saint, and to be a saint."

Finally, drawing inspiration from the life of St. Augustine, each of us can find hope and love within God's infinite mercy and compassion. This empowers us to put God's grace into action in our lives and the lives of those around us so that we can bring the hope and healing of the Gospel to a world that desperately needs it.