

27. August 2022

The struggle for conversion

Lk 7:11-17

Reading corresponding to the memorial of St. Monica

It happened that Jesus went to a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people. Now when he was near the gate of the town there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople was with her. When the Lord saw her he felt sorry for her and said to her, 'Don't cry.' Then he went up and touched the bier and the bearers stood still, and he said, 'Young man, I tell you: get up.' And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying, 'A great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited his people.' And this view of him spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside.

Today the Church commemorates St. Monica of Tagaste, that wonderful woman who prayed so much for the conversion of her son. Indeed, before her death she was able to witness the joy that the Lord heard her prayers and that her son, who was to become Saint Augustine, was converted. She was also able to win her difficult husband Patricius to the Christian faith.

To win someone to faith in the Lord means, spiritually speaking, that he is raised from the dead, that the true life of God can be poured into him, and that, by approaching the font of baptism, he becomes a member of the Mystical Body of the Risen Lord. All this happened with St. Augustine, and so it is very appropriate that the Gospel chosen for St. Monica's memorial is the resurrection of the son of the widow of Naim: *"The dead man sat up ...and Jesus gave him to his mother".*

Through her prayer, St. Monica wept and fought so hard for the conversion of her son... In her anguish, she turned to Bishop St. Ambrose, who addressed to her these golden words that have come down to us: *"A son of so many tears cannot be lost!"*

This is a great consolation for so many mothers who see their children take wrong paths; who no longer know how to reach them; who feel helpless as they watch them miss out on true life...

These mothers are like the widow in today's gospel, grieving for her only son. We can imagine her tears and grief, because it is hard when children die before their parents. It is also a heavy burden for these mothers that their children have fallen into spiritual death. Perhaps they sometimes wonder in torment whether they have done something wrong, whether their testimony of life has not been convincing enough; and with such questioning they increase their grief even more. However, also a St. Monica, who no doubt must have led a convincing Christian life, had to wait a long time for her son's conversion.

We are not aware of what is going on inside a person to bring about a conversion. Only God himself can touch a person's heart and enlighten his spirit. But this in no way means that we should be passive, just waiting for the great miracle of conversion to happen. No! We can do our part!

In addition to our witness of life, prayer and the sacrifices we can offer, it is also necessary to be ready to point out clearly what is not pleasing to God. St. Monica had the courage to tell her son that he could not live with a woman without being married, and did not allow him to continue living with her in the parental home. Today this position might seem exaggerated or even rigorous. But is it really so, is it not simply the practical consequence of the truth of our Christian faith, is it really doing a person good when we prefer not to say anything about that which separates them from God?

Jesus took pity on the widow who was weeping for her son, raised him from the dead and gave him back to his mother. And he did the same for St. Monica, who had fought so hard for her son. Jesus raised him from his spiritual death and gave him back to his mother in faith. From then on, they were united in the Lord.

The following lines, taken from the "Confessions of St. Augustine", are a wonderful testimony to this new union that arose between mother and son:

The day was now approaching when my mother Monica would depart from this life; you know that day, Lord, though we did not. She and I happened to be standing by ourselves at

a window that overlooked the garden in the courtyard of the house. At the time we were in Ostia on the Tiber. And so the two of us, all alone, were enjoying a very pleasant conversation, "forgetting the past and pushing on to what is ahead." We were asking one another in the presence of the Truth - for you are the Truth - what it would be like to share the eternal life enjoyed by the saints, which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, which has not even entered into the heart of man."

So, in our struggle for the conversion of those who are far from God and have lost their way, we can confidently turn to St. Monica, asking for her intercession, and we should also ask for her perseverance! Perhaps the Lord will again grant us another "giant in the faith", as his son, St. Augustine, became!

In a special way, we want to encourage mothers who suffer for their children who are on the wrong path, to take advantage of the grace of this day and to ask insistently for the intercession of St. Monica. And remember: *"A child of so many tears cannot be lost"*.