



ENCOURAGEMENT

FROM

ST. MONICA SODALITY

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Dear Members of the St. Monica Sodality,

I recently saw a motivational sign that stated:
PUSH—Pray Until Something Happens!

I imagine that this idea would be the summation of St. Monica's life! She certainly did **PUSH**. And then when something did happen (Augustine received the gift of Faith) she went on to her eternal life and continues to pray for all the other "Augustines".

The St. Monica Sodality exists solely to encourage you, its members, to cooperate with St. Monica in PUSHing. . . . The prayer life of a sodality member is important not just to the member himself/herself but to all of us.

St. Augustine about 400 AD gave us *Seven Steps* to spiritual wisdom based upon the reading, study, and meditation of the Holy Scriptures. He tells us that this is a slow endeavor—and he suggests that we take our time—that combined with prayer, this will lead us closer to God.

In Augustine's life, it was the words of a child saying, "pick up and read," that led St. Augustine to open the Bible and read Romans 13:13-14. As a result, he wrote, "at once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled" (Confessions 8.12).

The poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1858), on the following page, describes the difficulty in climbing the ladder of life to God. Longfellow echoes St. Augustine saying:

*The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.*

In 1920, Pope Benedict XV, in his encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus*, said, "Our one desire for all the Church's children is that, being saturated with the Bible, they may arrive at the all surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ."

And in 2007, our Pope Benedict XVI, citing the words of St. Jerome, said, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." The Holy Father advised all the faithful to read a passage from the Bible each day.

May I suggest that all sodality members, after reading St. Augustine's *Seven Steps*, on the following pages, try to develop the habit of daily reading, praying, and meditation on the words of Holy Scripture—slowly and with attention.

Father C. Frank Phillips, C.R.
Pastor, St. John Cantius Church,
International Director, St. Monica Sodality

PLEASE NOTE

The St. Monica Sodality has grown in the past 13 years to a membership of about 4,000. Expenses, printing and postage, have grown accordingly. The Sodality is now able to send the *Encouragement* newsletter by e-mail (in pdf format). This will help us cut down on the printing and postage expenses. If you prefer to receive this newsletter by e-mail, please send your e-mail address when you pay your yearly dues (if you are able), or when you contact us for any other reason.

The Sodality will continue to mail printed newsletters to those who prefer this method. Thank you for your cooperation.

Additionally, the St. Monica Sodality would appreciate any donations, as this will enable us to keep membership dues low for those on a fixed income. May God bless you.

THE LADDER OF ST. AUGUSTINE

BY HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW
FROM *BIRDS OF PASSAGE*

Saint Augustine! well hast thou said,
That of our vices we can frame
A ladder, if we will but tread
Beneath our feet each deed of shame!

All common things, each day's events,
That with the hour begin and end,
Our pleasures and our discontents,
Are rounds by which we may ascend.

The low desire, the base design,
That makes another's virtues less;
The revel of the ruddy wine,
And all occasions of excess;

The longing for ignoble things;
The strife for triumph more than truth;
The hardening of the heart, that brings
Irreverence for the dreams of youth;

All thoughts of ill; all evil deeds,
That have their root in thoughts of ill;
Whatever hinders or impedes
The action of the nobler will;--

All these must first be trampled down
Beneath our feet, if we would gain
In the bright fields of fair renown
The right of eminent domain.

We have not wings, we cannot soar;
But we have feet to scale and climb
By slow degrees, by more and more,
The cloudy summits of our time.

The mighty pyramids of stone
That wedge-like cleave the desert airs,
When nearer seen, and better known,
Are but gigantic flights of stairs.



The distant mountains, that uprear
Their solid bastions to the skies,
Are crossed by pathways, that appear
As we to higher levels rise.

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

Standing on what too long we bore
With shoulders bent and downcast eyes,
We may discern—unseen before—
A path to higher destinies.

Nor deem the irrevocable Past,
As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
If, rising on its wrecks, at last
To something nobler we attain.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S SPIRITUAL LADDER: SEVEN STEPS MOUNTING TO ETERNAL WISDOM

There are conventional signs which living creatures give each other by which they attempt to indicate, as far as is possible, what is on their mind. For men, some signs involve the sense of sight; many the sense of hearing, and few of any other senses. A nod gives a sign of assent to a person we wish to share our will with. A referee at a football game will raise both hands straight in the air over his head to signify a score. These signs are like visible words. However, among men words have gained a pre-eminence for expressing thought. Holy Scripture, God's Will for us, is communicated to us through words. It is God's Word, in man's words. Jesus Himself is the Eternal Word: "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn. 1:1).

The question then becomes, how do we approach Holy Scripture? First, St. Augustine tells us, is through **FEAR**: "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, wisdom and instruction, which only fools despise" (Prov. 1:7). It is from fearing God that we first learn to recognize His Will: what He wants us to do and what He wants us to avoid. This fear should awaken in us a healthy reflection of our bodily death and possible spiritual death, if we continue to choose to run away from Him.

Second, fear is tempered by **PIETY**, by which we become gentle and humble. So, when Sacred Scripture attacks some of our faults, or when we think we know better than God's Word, we need to reflect and realize that what is written there is more beneficial and reasonable, even if hidden, than what we could know ourselves. Pride is the enemy here. Since the mind usually disdains anything it learns easily, those who read superficially and very quickly, err greatly. Great care and time must be put into reading the Sacred Texts very carefully and slowly. A slow, reflective, deeply meditative approach will enhance the ability of the Scriptures to penetrate into your heart.

The third step is **KNOWLEDGE**, learning to love God for His own sake and love your neighbor as yourself. Any careful, thorough, close reading of Scripture should clearly point out just how far we have become enmeshed in the love of the world and temporal things. Therefore, it should instill in us a healthy desire to go to confession to get back to loving God and neighbor, whom we separated from when we sinned. Scripture should cause us to mourn our sins. We should beg God through "unceasing prayer" (1 Thess. 5:17) for the consolation of His Divine Assistance.

This brings us to step four: **FORTITUDE**: to maintain courage, no matter what the cost, in our efforts to obtain True Justice—which is giving God and our fellow men their due, not about getting what I want. In seeking after justice with unwavering perseverance we withdraw from the deadly pleasure of passing things, toward the love of the Eternal Things, namely the Holy Trinity.

The fifth step is the counsel of **MERCY**. As we cleanse our soul, we can become upset and vexed at its constant craving for lesser things. Sometimes it seems that the harder we try to be good, the more evil we do. St. Augustine counsels mercy and kindness in the treatment of your own soul. No one would walk into a hospital and force a sick person to get completely better 'or else'. Then neither should we force this straightjacket method on our sickly soul either. Just like the sick person in the hospital, your soul also needs time to heal. So, be fair with yourself. Set realistic goals. Sometimes baby steps or even crawling are needed before one can walk fully erect again. Seek steady progress, not immediate, absolute perfection, lest you give up in despair. Also, constantly practicing the true, immediate and vigorous unfeigned love of neighbor, to the point of perfection, when you can say you truly "love your enemies" (Mt. 6:12), will help substantially in rooting out one's worst and most stubborn sins.

The sixth step is one of **VISION**: when we can truly see that the more we cleanse ourselves of the love of inferior things in this world, the closer we come to seeing God, “Taste and see how good is the Lord” (Ps. 34:9). To the extent that we love the world, we do not see God. To the degree that we die to ourselves, we experience Him more concretely in our daily lives.

The seventh step is **WISDOM**. While we still walk more by “faith” than by “sight,” at this level God so cleanses the heart that we rarely compare our neighbors or other creatures to Him by choosing these ‘lesser gods’ over Him. Moreover, souls will be so holy and on fire with love of God at this stage, that they will seldom prefer to turn away from the Eternal Truth, through a desire for pleasing men or self-gratification, no matter what. “Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father” (Mt. 10:32-33).

As the result of following these seven steps, we should grow more deeply in our love and devotion to our Lord. Moreover, these steps are not mutually exclusive. In other words, one step does not necessarily take place, while the others remain silent. Many times in one’s spiritual journey there is an overlapping of stages. What is important here is that we recognize what we are going through, and work with the Sacred Scriptures and these seven steps to allow our hearts to be opened more deeply and thereby move closer to God

by Stephen N. Filippo—IgnatiusInsight.com

St. Augustine wrote that Jacob’s ladder represented the Church and the angels the patriarch saw ascending and descending upon it represented the evangelists or preachers of the Gospel—those who ascended into the heavens, beauty, and knowledge of Christ and then descended again to give spiritual milk to the babes of Christ (Lectures or Tractates on St. John, Tractate 7, John 1:34-51; see also 2 Cor. 12:2). According to Augustine, teachers of the Word also ascend and descend upon Christ when they preach ascendingly of Christ’s majesty or divine nature and then descend to relate to their audiences that our Lord came to earth and became a man. He says, “Christ is the ladder reaching from earth to heaven, or from the carnal to the spiritual: for by His assistance the carnal ascend to spirituality; and the spiritual may be said to descend to nourish the carnal with milk when they cannot speak to them as to spiritual, but as to carnal. There is thus both an ascent and a descent upon the Son of man.” He adds that “We ascend to Him to see Him in heavenly places; we descend to Him for the nourishment of His weak members. And the ascent and descent are by Him as well as to Him. Following His example, those who preach Him not only rise to behold Him exalted, but let themselves down to give a plain announcement of the truth” (St. Augustine On the Morals of the Catholic Church, Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon, Book 12).

PRAYER TO SAINT MONICA

Exemplary Mother of the great Augustine, you perseveringly pursued your wayward son not with wild threats but with prayerful cries to heaven. Intercede for all mothers in our day so that they may learn to draw their children to God. Teach them how to remain close to their children, even the prodigal sons and daughters who have sadly gone astray. Amen.

“ENCOURAGING” REPORTS FROM OUR MEMBERS. . .

An Address by Benjamin Barron

“O Lord, give me chastity and give me concupiscence, but do not give it to me yet.”

We all know that quote pretty well. St. Augustine, one of the Church fathers, a doctor of the church, known as the doctor of grace, Bishop, and author of various theological and philosophical works has had a great impact on my life. Despite his many works and accomplishments, none of these is what drew me closer to Saint Augustine.

Born in 354, Augustine had a wild wild youth. And his life is similar to mine. Now do I say this because I stole from a pear tree in my youth—no. Do I say this because I was addicted to watching Gladiator fights—no. Do I say this because I have illegitimate children—NO. But I was, and still am a sinner. Augustine was a sinner, but now he is a saint. And this is what I strive to be.

Now if there are any other sinners in this chapel, you might be asking yourself: How did he do it, How did Augustine, while in the depths of his sin, finally become a Saint?

He had help. His mother, St. Monica, helped him. Although Monica seems alone in her quest to convert her son, she was not alone, she cried to heaven. While Monica knelt beside her bed, while Augustine was out carousing on the town or learning the deep secrets of the Manichees. She cried. . . . The tears of St. Monica, a mother, carry much weight in heaven. I can just imagine Monica calling Augustine while at school. Augustine, are you making it to Mass? And Augustine saying, “No mom, I am with the Manichees now, we have a really good thing going here.”

My whole family has my mother to thank for our faith. Every time my mother went to Mass, at the elevation she prayed for the conversion of my father. My father, born and raised Jewish, married my mom 25 years ago. And for 25 years, my mother prayed for his conversion. And this last October, my father was brought into the church.

And every time the Precious Blood was elevated at Mass, my mother prayed for her children and God heard her prayer. When I was away from my faith, through my mother’s intercession, God brought me back. He called, he cried, he shattered my deafness.

What is the point of this whole story? LOVE your mother. If you should love any person on this planet it should be your mother. Because a mother’s prayer and a mother’s tears carry a lot of weight in heaven.

St. Augustine and St. Monica . . . Pray for us.

Minnesota

Our son has been away from our beloved Church for 20 years — He became friends with a devout Catholic man at work. After many discussions about the Faith he decided to accept God’s grace and re-enter Church life. Thank God and St. Monica.

Ohio

A year ago I petitioned St. Monica for my children and grandsons—they had been away from Mass for a number of years. Two Sundays ago my grandson and his wife had their baby son baptized a Catholic. Now they are attending Mass. Please continue to pray for my family, there are so many who do not even think it is important to pray in any way.

Florida

Just a note to thank you and let you know your prayers and mine have been answered, at least partially. Julie, one of our six has returned to the church. Thank God. Please keep praying for our other four children. I am dedicated to this idea of praying them all back to our Holy Church.

Texas

Several years ago I requested prayers for my four children. All had left the Catholic Church. And then a miracle! My son (who had been missing for 14 years) re-united with us. He had been homeless, after the divorce, had acquired an alcohol problem, etc. Thanks be to God, he finally pulled himself together and now has a job and has been alcohol free for 2 years. Please continue your prayers for all my children.

Colorado

My friend has return to the Church—went to confession, is going to Mass and is even joining me in saying the St. Monica Novena Prayers. Thanks be to God.

Massachusetts

DO YOU HAVE A LAPSI IN YOUR FAMILY?

Lapsi is a Latin word used to refer to persons who have lapsed from the practice of the Catholic Faith. (*Lapsi* is a collective plural. Singular is *lapsus* for a male and *lapsa* for a female.) If you do, here is what we suggest: Send their names to: St. Monica Sodality, 825 N Carpenter St, Chicago, IL 60642-5499.

PRAY WHILE YOU DRIVE — USING ST. MONICA CDs

A 50-minute professional CD of the St. Monica Novena Prayers and music is available for \$12.00 each, plus \$2.00 for postage. The “Seraphim Vocal Ensemble” provides the inspirational hymns. Order a CD to play in your car when you’re stuck in traffic—increase your prayer life—decrease tension. Order from St Monica Sodality, 825 N. Carpenter St, Chicago, IL 60642-5499.

SODALITY MEMBERSHIP

Saint Monica Sodality members meet every Wednesday evening at 7:00 pm at St. John Cantius Church, Chicago. Novena prayers and Rosary are followed by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

On the feast of St. Monica, May 4th, (in the Traditional calendar), please renew your membership by sending \$20.00 (outside U.S.—\$30.00 U.S. funds) along with any change of address information, e-mail address, or letters of gratitude to St. Monica. New members are accepted at any time and prayer booklets, petition forms, medals, and rule booklets are available from: Saint Monica Sodality, 825 North Carpenter Street, Chicago, IL 60642-5499. Phone: 312-243-7373 - Fax 312-243-4545. E-mail: stmonica@cantius.org Website: www.cantius.org.

PAST ISSUES of *Encouragement* and more information about the St. Monica Sodality are available on the website, www.cantius.org under Organizations, St. Monica Sodality.

JULY 2009

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FROM

ST. MONICA SODALITY
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IN MY DISTRESS
I CRIED UNTO THE
LORD



St. Monica, pray for us.