

Readings: *Ecclesiasticus 26:1 – 4, 13 – 16; Psalm 129 (130); Luke 7: 11 – 17.*

Monica was the mother of Augustine, whose festival is tomorrow. His book, the *Confessions*, tells us most of what we know about her. She was born about AD 331 in North Africa, which by that time had many strong Christian centres. Monica was brought up in a devout family. She married Patricius, who had links with the Christian community, but was not baptized until AD 370, the year before he died. By this time Monica had born him several children, of whom Augustine, born in 354, was the eldest, and it seems her favourite. She and Patricius took considerable care over Augustine's education. She had him entered as a catechumen, but he was not baptized.

When Augustine's studies led him away from the Church and he began to live an irregular life, Monica wept and prayed for his conversion, while at one time refusing to have anything to do with him. In 383 he went to Italy, taking his mistress and their son: Monica followed him, first to Rome and then to Milan. There she was befriended by Bishop Ambrose and became a regular member of his congregation.

When under Ambrose's influence Augustine was baptized at Easter 387 Monica was profoundly happy. Later that year she travelled south with Augustine on his return to Africa, but while they rested before the voyage at Ostia, the port of Rome, she was taken ill.

In the *Confessions* Augustine tells of her last days: *We talked together, alone in deep joy...*

forgetting the things that were behind and looking forward to those that were before, they spoke of the eternal life of the saints, and panted for the waters of the fountain of life which is with God.

One day she fainted away, and on recovering said to Augustine and his brother: *Here you will bury your mother.* While Augustine remained silent his brother said that he would be happier if she died in her own country. Her reply was: *Lay this body wherever it may be. Let no care of it disturb you; this only I ask of you that, wherever you may be, you should remember me at the altar of God.*

She died and was buried at Ostia. Her body was moved, first to the church of S. Aurea, and later, to the church of S. Augustine in Rome. In 1945 part of her grave slab was discovered near the church of S. Aurea, with the inscription: *Here the most virtuous mother of a young man set her ashes...Mother of the virtues, more fortunate because of her offspring.*