

# St. Augustine

*"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." ~ St. Augustine*

Saint Augustine is one of the greatest Fathers of the Church. He was an original thinker who became recognized as a remarkable leader of Christian faith. One of the guiding forces in Saint Augustine's life was his Christian mother, Saint Monica.

## Early Childhood

Augustine was born on November 13, 354 at Tagaste, a small town of Numidia in north Africa (now in Algeria), not far from Hippo. His father, Patricius, was a pagan with a Roman citizenship and of a violent disposition; but through the example and prudent conduct of his wife, Saint Monica, he was baptized along with his mother a little before his death.

His father wanted him to become a man of learning and cared very little about his character so Augustine grew a reckless life enjoying all human pleasures

## Youth and Education

When he was 16, Augustine went to Carthage where he studied rhetoric and law with eagerness and pleasure; but his motives were vanity and ambition.

At Carthage, he entered into a relationship with a woman (to whom he remained faithful until he sent her away from him 15 years later) and he got a son, Adeodatus, in 372.

## Teachings influencing Augustine

Augustine was very impressed with Cicero's teachings which led him to seek chastity and look for the truth. He studied the Scriptures but from a subjective attitude not with the spirit of faith and humility but rather with pride.

Then he fell into Manichaeism - a combination of pagan religions and philosophy. A heresy that spread at that time claiming that the body of Christ descended from heaven, and was not a materialistic body, but rather an imaginary body that dissolved in His divine nature.

## European Trips

In 382 AD, his friends convinced him to go to Rome for wealth and fame. Monica tried to prevent him but failed. He was then appointed by the government as a teacher in Milan, where his mother, and his friend Alipius joined him. Saint Monica's only ambition was to convert her son to Christianity.

## St. Ambrose Impact

In Milan, Saint Augustine came under the influence of Saint Ambrose the bishop; he began to go to his sermons, not with an expectation of profiting by them but just to gratify his curiosity and to enjoy the eloquence. St. Ambrose was one of the greatest speakers and rhetoricians.

Augustine listened to Old Testament explanations from St. Ambrose as well as his answers to Manichaean followers and other heresies. He found that the discourses were more learned than the heresies he adopted and began to read the New Testament, especially Saint Paul's writings.

Saint Augustine's spiritual, moral and intellectual struggle went on; he was convinced of the truth of Christianity, but his will was weaker than the worldly temptations, and delayed his return to Christ for many months as he thought that it was impossible for him to keep his chastity.

## The Big Repentance

A true believer named Ponticianus visited Augustine, and friend Alipius reading the Letters of St. Paul. Ponticianus told him about the **life of St. Anthony** and how his story led one of the nobles to leave everything behind and follow his path.

This is when Augustine's heart was touched. He thought how uneducated people steal the kingdom, but here he was, with all his knowledge, still in sin!

He rushed to the garden, greatly upset; tears filling his eyes, he threw himself on the grass under a fig tree and reproached himself bitterly crying out:

"And Thou, O Lord, how long? How long? Is it to be tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour put an end to shame?"

These words of repentance marked the beginning of Augustine's new life. As he was weeping in bitter contrition of his heart, he heard a voice from a neighbouring house, chanting and repeating, "Take up and read". Instantly, he went to read the letters of St. Paul and he saw this verse:

**"And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:11-14).**

This high point in the conversion of Saint Augustine took place in the September of 386, when he was 32 years old. Him, his son Adeodatus and his friend Alipius were baptized by Saint Ambrose at Easter the following year in the presence of saint Monica

She was very happy that her tears and her prayers for almost 20 years were accepted and departed shortly after. Before her departure, she told Augustine that she had accomplished her role now that he is a servant of the Lord. It was as St. Ambrose told her

“the son of tears could not perish or be lost”

## St. Augustine’s Service

After St. Monica’s departure, Augustine went back to Rome where he fought Manichean heresy. Then, he went back to Thagaste

He donated all his possessions and dedicated himself to prayer and meditation in the word of God with his friends for 3 years

Then, he got ordained as a priest by the Bishop of Hippo. He established a sort of monastery in his house where he lived with Saint Alipius, Saint Evodius, Saint Possidius and others. He also instituted a convent for nuns which was run by his sister

In 395 AD, he was ordained as the bishop of Hippo. Through his 35 years as a bishop of Hippo, Saint Augustine had to defend the faith against multiple heresies. He opposed the Donatists, the Pelagians, and the Alarians. He attended an assembly held by the command of Emperor Honorius in 411 AD against Donatism; which included 275 bishops and 279 Donatist.

When St. Augustine was 72 years old, he chose Heraclius, the youngest among his deacons, to take care of the church as he wanted him to be his successor.

Saint Augustine departed in peace on August 28, 430, at the age of 76 years old. Among his greatest works is the 15 volume "On the City of God" which took him 30 years to write, and his "Confessions". He wrote ~230 books, including Historical books, philosophical letters, and commentaries on a couple of biblical books especially St. Paul’s letters.