

Masses

tabernacle

IN THIS IMAGE, SAINT MONICA PRAYS BEFORE THE TABERNACLE, drawing our hearts to the Mass and the Real Presence of Jesus. This devotion, through the intercession of Saint Monica, is rooted in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The faithful are encouraged to have Masses offered for the conversion of their loved ones who have separated themselves from Christ and His Church. In every Mass there is an opportunity to join our own prayers and sacrifices to the one, infinite, and perfect sacrifice of Jesus. We present our prayers and offerings into the hands of Christ who in His sacrifice brings to perfection all human attempts to offer sacrifices. Saint Monica knew the value of a Mass. Near the conclusion of her life she asked for only one thing of Augustine: that he remember her at the altar of the Lord.

In Catholic churches, the tabernacle houses the Real Presence of Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist. Though He is always spiritually with us, Christ allows Himself to be physically present in the tabernacles of our churches so that He might be uniquely available to us always and everywhere in a way which touches our humanity. Praying before the Body of Christ present in the tabernacle is a great comfort and consolation in the midst of our anxieties and fears. Jesus, by His willingness to be present in this way, reveals to us His great desire to draw us to Himself and to be united with us most intimately.

Tears

tears

THE TEARS OF MONICA ARE THE FOCAL POINT of this image. Saint Monica is known for her tears shed in prayer for the conversion of her son and this image depicts her catching those tears in her hands and offering them to God. Mentioned in the collect for Mass offered in her honor, her tears are the expression of her deeply rooted desire, or longing, to see her son reconciled to God. Her prayer was fervent and deeply heartfelt. We pray for the return of our loved ones to the Church because we desire that they be in friendship with Christ, recognizing that friendship with Christ is the source of true fulfillment and joy in this life as well as in the life to come. Every person is unique; sometimes tears are physically poured out in prayer and sometimes they are not. Regardless, after the example of Saint Monica, both our desire for the conversion of our loved ones and our prayerful offerings to God, ought to be rooted in a deep and profound longing to see our children and other loved ones in true friendship with Jesus Christ.

The Saint Monica Project

prayer

O Almighty God, full of goodness and compassion, you mercifully accepted the prayers and tears of Saint Monica and poured an abundance of your grace upon her son, drawing him to yourself in the midst of Divine Providence. Through her intercession, I come before you now, humbly seeking the same abundant grace for my (SON/DAUGHTER). In your untiring love, restore (HIM/HER) to Christ and Your Church, through whom you give every grace and blessing. Loving Father, I beg for myself also the grace never to part from you by my sins. Trusting in the providential care you have for all your children, I ask you to continue to draw me more securely into your Fatherly embrace. I make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. AMEN.



Blessed Monica, you who occupy a privileged place in Heaven, by the power of your proven intercession obtain for my (SON/DAUGHTER) the grace of an intimate friendship with Jesus Christ in this life and glory with Him forever in the life to come. AMEN.

WITH ECCLESIASTICAL APPROVAL

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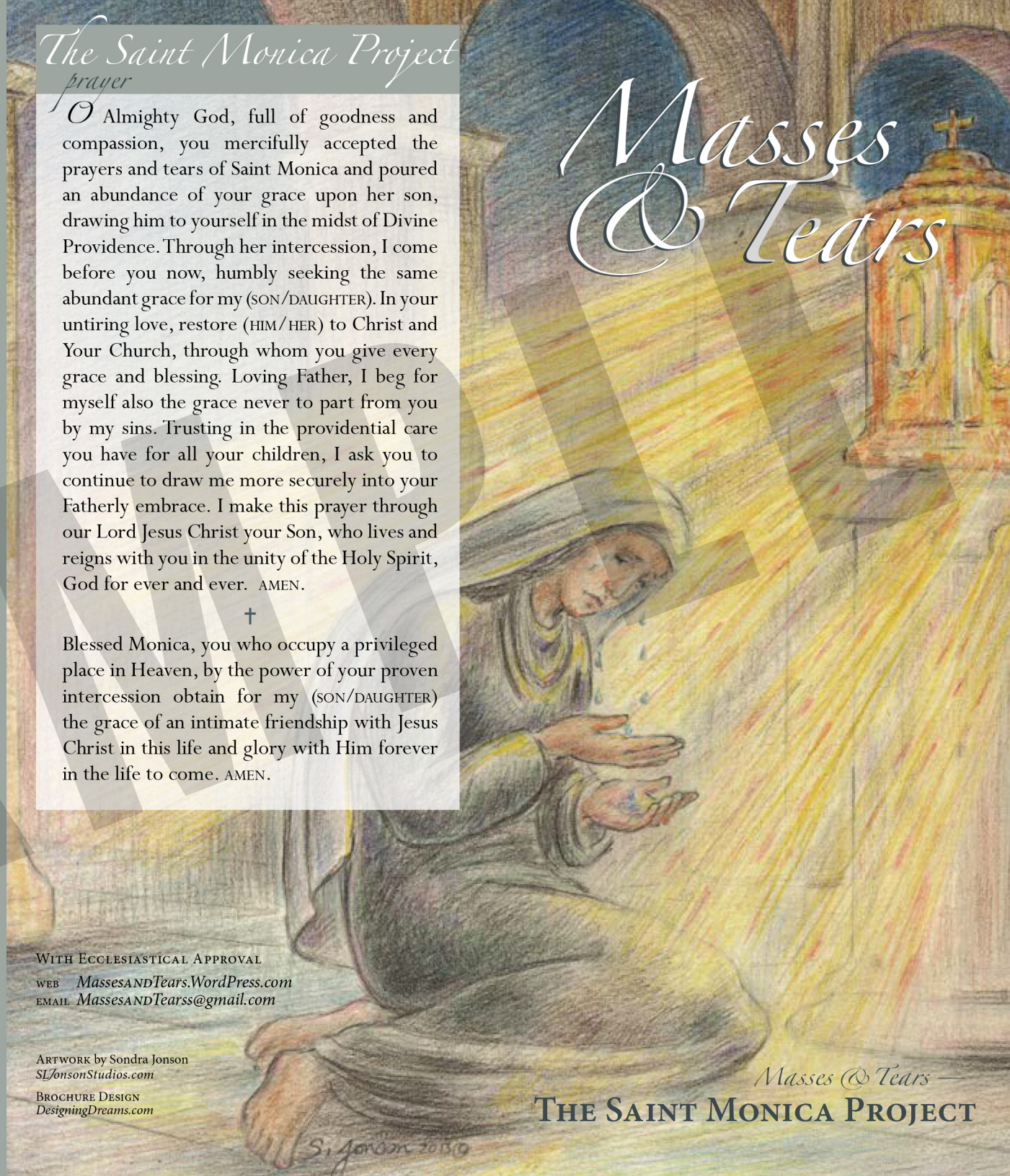
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THE SAINT MONICA PROJECT

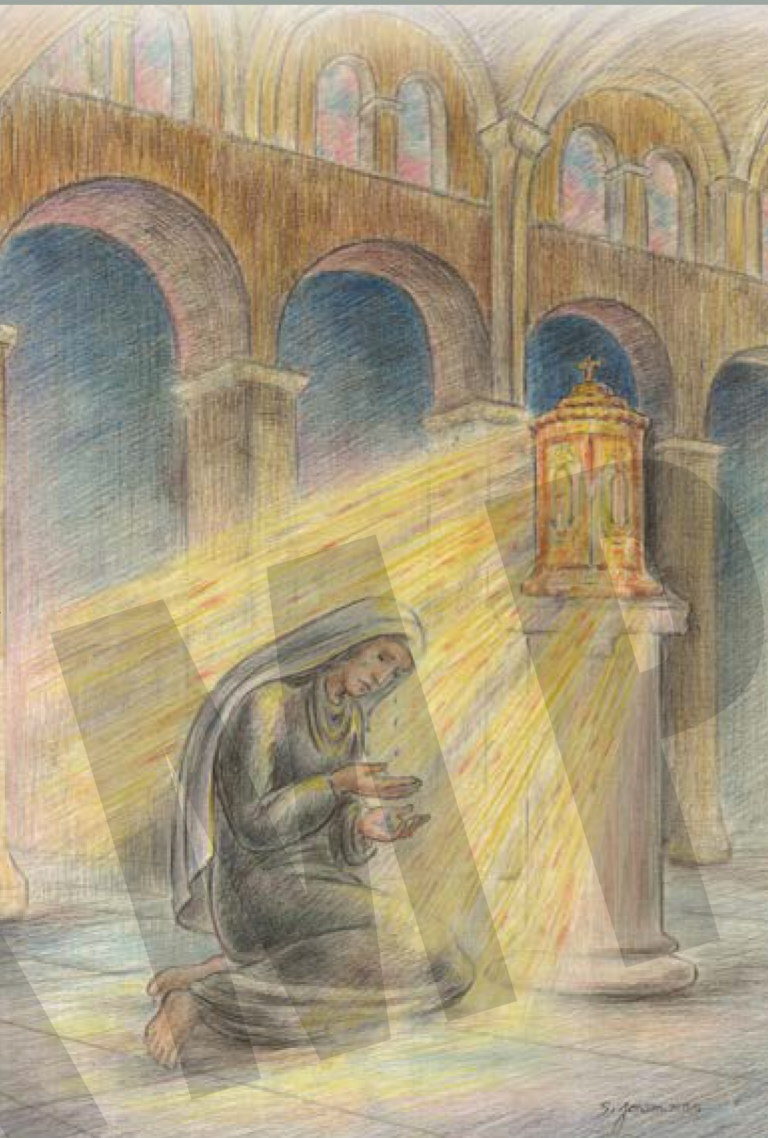


hands THE HANDS OF SAINT MONICA ARE IN A UNIQUE POSITION: BOTH A POSITION OF OFFERING AND A POSITION OF RECEIVING. This must always be the nature of our prayer. We offer to God our prayers, petitions, and sacrifices, and not only are we willing to receive that for which we ask, but we also must be willing to receive whatever He gives. He may give a portion; He may give something we need much more than whatever it is we desire. With offering hands, Monica gives her tears as evidence of her begging and pleading for the conversion of her son. With receiving hands, Monica expresses “Thy will be done.” To us, the work of God’s grace sometimes seems slow or lacking in some way. Like the perfect prayer of our Lord, our prayer must include “Thy will be done.” God may give us what we ask, the conversion of our loved ones, but He may give it in portions, in His time, and as our loved ones allow.

altar of repose THE TABERNACLE STANDS ON AN ALTAR OF REPOSE, RAISING THE PRESENCE OF GOD WELL ABOVE the slumping Saint Monica. Her feminine and soft features contrast with the stout, angular characteristics of the tabernacle and the altar of repose and speak to our sense of weakness in these situations compared to the strength of the Almighty God. We are reminded that no amount of sin or apparent distance from God, nor explicit or implicit hatred or dislike for God is insurmountable in the face of God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. We can be shocked and dismayed at the hurtful things said by loved ones who are away from God, sometimes leading us to the brink of despair or to give up on our prayer. The resolute and strong presence of God in this image can strengthen and encourage a parent’s heart. As evidenced by the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, even the most hateful of God are no match for the strength of God.

arches THE ARCHES IN THE BACKGROUND OF THE IMAGE PLACE THIS DEVOTION IN THE EMBRACE of the Church and in the depths of contemplative prayer. Though we pray for loved ones who have separated themselves from the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, we are comforted, encouraged, and strengthened by our brothers and sisters in the family of the Church. We pray as one, especially in the Mass, where the Body of Christ offers continuous prayers in union with Jesus the Head to the Father on behalf of the lost sheep. We who pray for those fallen away never pray alone.

The arches also call to mind the monastic life. Likely for Monica, more than her spoken words of petition to the Father for the conversion of her son, it was her meditative and contemplative prayer which was at the heart of her faith in God’s presence and at the heart of her friendship with Jesus. Active as we may be, we must foster the heart of a contemplative and enter deeply into God’s presence. Doing so brings forth trust in God, perseverance in prayer, and a heart from which comes powerful petition.



posture RATHER THAN KNEELING UPRIGHT AND LOOKING DIRECTLY AT THE TABERNACLE, Monica is instead slouched over and looking down. She is exhausted in her prayer but she continues to come before the Lord. Her perseverance was an essential characteristic of her prayer. As in the life of Augustine, conversion can be a process, a “project.” Our Lord encouraged perseverance in prayer and Saint Monica is a great example. The “Project” portion of our title reminds us of the necessity of perseverance. Though Monica no longer looks directly at the tabernacle, the presence of the rays, almost without her notice, shows God always at work and always with a listening ear. Throughout years of intercession for her son, Monica’s perseverance in prayer

portrayed a confident faith that God was indeed listening and acting, even if His work went apparently unnoticed. Though sometimes unperceived, God is always at work in our lives and in the lives of those for whom we pray.

rays THE RAYS OF GOLD FLECKED WITH RED ARE SYMBOLIC OF THE GRACE AND WORK OF GOD (GOLD) BY THE ACTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (RED). In this image, the rays are abundant because God’s blessings and gifts of grace are so often abundant. Even a saint like Monica isn’t able to receive all that God is offering to her, symbolized by the rays extending above and below her. In the case of those who have fallen away from Him and currently deny Him, God’s outpouring of grace is still abundant, expressive of His perfect love and His great desire for the return of His prodigal children. The abundant rays, as expressions of God’s goodness and love, will renew our confidence that God’s grace and light will overcome doubt and darkness. In the midst of that confidence, a distinctive characteristic of our prayer must be that our loved ones will eventually be open and receptive to the gifts and graces God continues to offer them.

clothing IN THIS IMAGE, SAINT MONICA IS BAREFOOT AND DRESSED IN THE DRAB COLORS OF THE POOR. She is in stark contrast to the gold of the tabernacle and of the rays of God’s grace. Whatever our material possessions or fortunate circumstances in this life, we are always poor before God and we are always in need of the spiritual gifts He gives. Recognizing our poverty before God, we are able to approach Him with humility. Many mothers and fathers come to a point where they feel helpless and sometimes hopeless to be able to do anything to help their children find God again. It is often in this poverty and humility that the most fruitful prayer is born. Though we continue to do our best to encourage a child’s return to God, especially by our example of a life lived in friendship with Jesus Christ, our prayer must be born from a humble heart which knows it is only the transformative power of God’s grace which will bring about true conversion in those who have left the Faith.

clothing transformed THE RAYS THAT IMPACT SAINT MONICA IN THE IMAGE ARE TRANSFORMING her—what is poor becomes rich. Though she appears not to be conscious of God at work in this moment, His grace and the power of the Holy Spirit are working, not only in the life of her son but also in her. The years of prayer and sacrifice on behalf of her son, and the tears she offered to God from a desperate and humble heart, made her open to the abundant grace of God which sanctified her. The heavy burden, the cross she carried of a wayward son, was the very cross that brought about her sanctity as she carried it well in the footsteps of Christ. The cross carried in union with the suffering Jesus by many parents who bear the spiritual burden of a child who has left the Church may very well contribute to their own sanctification and salvation.