

A holy innocent for the Culture of Life

By Nicholas Marmalejo and Anita Crane

All children are special, but some are called to extraordinary lives—lives marked by extreme suffering—and some children respond with remarkable heroism. Monica Rose Shinger was one such person, and her parents were equal partners.



Monica's arrival

April 24, 2001, Anne Shinger decided to offer up her own labor pains for the sake of her obstetrician, a doctor who had performed five abortions. That evening, Monica was born breach. From the beginning, Monica suffered serious, painful afflictions. She was born with the lack of an anus, which required an immediate colostomy. The next week, doctors diagnosed Monica with Tetrasomy-22 (Cat-Eye Syndrome), the rare disease that affects major organs including the skeletal system, heart, kidneys, eyes and ears.

Soon afterwards, Monica became jaundiced and had to undergo a liver transplant. Anne said that the more she and Tim prayed, the worse things became. At times, she wondered whether God had abandoned her family. Five months after Monica's arrival, however, Anne resigned herself to the heavenly Father, praying, "Do whatever you want with Monica. She is your child. Not my will but yours." A great peace came over Anne, and as Monica's successive trials took shape, Monica's parents saw God's hand working in each of them.

Monica's legacy

Over the course of three years, Monica's health declined dramatically, and each incident was conspicuously in tune with major events that rocked the Church in the United States. While the U.S. bishops met to address the numerous chastity problems in the Church, including whether to deny pro-abortion "Catholic" politicians Holy Communion, Monica's parents continued to offer their daughter's agonies to God in order to purify the Church.

Eventually, Tim and Anne

approached their bishop. When Milwaukee's Archbishop Timothy Dolan met little Monica, he was so impressed by Tim and Anne's faith, he encouraged them to contact all bishops. In April 2004, Tim and Anne wrote a detailed testimony about Monica's trials, stating, "We do not believe that Monica's sufferings are happening by chance, but that God has called her to be a victim soul in our present time ... When we look at Monica's history, we see her suffering for the sins of abortion, partial birth abortion, sterilization, homosexuality, euthanasia, human cloning and sins against chastity. These are all sins against chastity."

Archbishop Dolan informed the Shingers that their letter had moved some of his brethren. At the U.S. bishops' 2004 summer conference in Denver, two bishops quoted the letter verbatim while others inquired about Monica's well-being. Bishop Victor Galeone of Saint Augustine, Florida called Monica "a true victim soul."

As the bishops' Denver meeting concluded, Monica's health continued its spiral downward. After her tenth surgery, Monica became sick with pneumonia. For seven weeks she was sick in the hospital, struggling for her life.

After a CT scan, her doctors found a major brain bleed. Monica was going brain dead, and the Shinger family knew the Lord was calling her home.

Joy amidst pain

Watching Monica suffer was difficult for the entire family, including Monica's three elder brothers, Justin, Mark and Nicholas. Nevertheless, Monica was a miracle of love.

At Monica's funeral, Anne spoke to her daughter, saying, "Monica, you demanded so much constant care from us that we didn't have time to be self-centered. You turned our family into a self-giving and other-centered family... Monica, even though you suffered greatly, you were joyful, peaceful and loving to everyone. You always had a smile on your face and would reach out to touch people and wave at them. You were the family hugger that would hug the boys whenever they cried, and at times you would hug me as I cried for you!"

On last year's feast of the Transfiguration, Monica died in the arms of her loving parents. August 6, 2004 was this holy innocent's birthday into eternal life.

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