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“Who, then, is the faithful and prudent servant, whom the master has put in charge?” (Matthew 24:45).

*1 Cor 1:1-9; Matt 24:42-51*

Conversion stories are about hope. The church will commemorate two saints today and tomorrow whose shared conversion story brought both light and shadow into the history of Western Christianity. St. Monica (8/27) and St. Augustine (8/28), a persistent mother and her reluctant son, demonstrate the power of grace to illuminate the Gospel through human relationships. Monica’s tears pursued Augustine through years of moral weakness and intellectual blindness until he was baptized and made a bishop whose writings changed the trajectory of the church.

Today’s Gospel is about the call to service. Matthew applies Jesus’ words to the pastors entrusted with the care of faith communities in the first century awaiting the *parousia*. They were to stay alert at their posts fulfilling their duties. Some leaders were apparently already slacking off, abusing others and getting drunk in the assumption that the Lord’s return was delayed. Jesus warns them that the Son of Man will come when they least expect it, like a thief in the night.

Augustine may have thought he could delay his conversion, and he even records in his *Confessions* that during his early sexual exploits he prayed, “Make me good but not now.” Near the end of his life he lamented, “Late have I loved you.” But as the

bishop of Hippo in North Africa, he was a faithful pastor and example. Monica, who died after his conversion, must have been in his thoughts often, and from his writings we have the sense that Jesus came often to confirm him as an Apostle during the decades when the church was finding itself and its theological underpinnings as quarrels and heresies influenced its course.

In today's world and church, we are learning just how important it is to have good servant leaders. Pope Francis has charted the way forward through many crises, beginning with the church's own conversion from inward thinking and myopia. The world is reeling from climate change, flagrant human rights abuses, economic and social imbalances that threaten its stability and future. We need to select and support good leaders.

Jesus' question, "Who is the faithful and prudent servant?" reverberates in our political and global institutions, warning us to beware the thief in the night and assuring us that the Master will return on schedule. He urges us to remain alert and faithful, caring for those entrusted to us. "Blessed is the servant whom the master on his arrival finds doing so."

Our hope also lies in conversion. What the world needs is a change of heart. No social or structural changes will happen without inner conversion. St. Monica brought a mother's love to bear on her son, and St. Augustine multiplied that love to change the course of history. Grace awaits us if we make our lives available to God as they did to share in Christ's redemptive power to change the world.

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