

O Harken Thou  
(Elgar)HTV.E-728  
2'

This hymn I've been using since June, to open and close these Midday Prayers, is by the English composer Elgar: and it's called 'O Harken Thou' — O Harken Thou to the voice of my calling. It's particularly apt today, I think, for today's feast-day, I mean. The past couple of years, around about this date, I notice that I've read for you the same passage from the Confessions of St Augustine. And I make no apology for repeating it again today, later in the programme; for I think it's one of the most moving and beautiful passages from that famous book, and can well stand repetition or (indeed) hearing it for the first time. It's St Augustine writing about the death of his mother, St Monica — and it's her feast-day today, followed (nicely) by his tomorrow. There aren't many mothers and sons who are both revered as saints; and of course it's because Augustine wrote about her that we know what little we do know of St Monica. One thing about her was her incessant prayer for her son, a prayer that was answered in Augustine's conversion, so that she died happy and at peace in the one faith with the son to whom she was so devoted, for whom she'd shed so many tears. For many years Augustine had been a sorrow to her, especially when he took up with an unknown woman. It was at that time that a bishop whom Monica consulted about what she should do, gave her the reassurance that it was not possible that the son of so many tears should be lost. She had tried to bring him up as a Christian, but he had scorned her religion. When, in his late 20s, he shipped away from their native North Africa to pursue his career in

Italy, Monica followed him, first to Rome and then Milan where she came to know St Ambrose. Finally, her tenacity and her prayer were rewarded, when Augustine decided to receive baptism, at the hands of St Ambrose. That was in 387: mother and son then set out to return to Africa, but Monica fell ill near Rome, and died at the port of Ostia soon afterwards. The story of Monica and her devotion to her wayward son is not unfamiliar; how many mothers grieve so, because their children go against the faith that is so dear to them and which they would want to share, above all with their children. Monica too, wanted the best for her Augustine, in terms of his success and career — but the two seemed incompatible. Above all, she pray for him, incessantly. Let us pray today, for all mothers: especially for mothers who grieve and are distressed on account of their children, who feel abandoned or cast aside, or left to cope on their own. May they exhibition and seek what is truly best for the children they love: may they be helped and inspired by God to guide their children in the love of God and of others, and to pray continuously for those they've brought into this world who must each eventually make their own separate lives. May still of Monica's devotion, both to God and to her son Augustine, be with every mother today; and with Augustine, may each of us remember with joy and gratefulness to God our own mother this day. For a prayer - music now, the Lord's Prayer from the Russian Orthodox Liturgy — the version of Rimsky-Korsakof MUSIC. PRAYERS St Augustine, on the death of his mother St Monica: ☉☉. [Brev. 27 Aug.]

Charles Kelly, Rus  
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