

**Reflection on the Gospel-17th Sunday in Ordinary Time C
(Luke 11:1-13)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

This Sunday's gospel offers three little cameos about praying: two teachings on prayer sandwiching a strange parable. In the first cameo, Jesus is at prayer and one of the disciples asks him to teach them to pray. Jesus responds as any devout first century Jew might respond, evoking the words of the Jewish Kaddish prayer: "May the great name of God be exalted and sanctified, throughout the world.... May God's kingship be established in your lifetime and in your days...." In this context, Jesus calls God "father", a metaphor or image denoting the power of God over against the power of the Roman emperor. The prayer continues: "Keep giving us each day the bread we need." It is not a prayer for more than we need, but for just as much as we need. The parable that follows will demonstrate how this might happen. The final petitions in the prayer that Jesus teaches are for forgiveness for sin "as we forgive each who is in debt to us" and freedom from testing, both recurring themes in Luke's gospel. We cannot live without "bread" just as we cannot live without the peace of mind that comes from forgiveness and the knowledge that God is with us in times of trial.

The second cameo has raised questions for interpreters. Is this parable about persistence or shame? These are two very different concepts, but both have been suggested as the motive for the sleeping neighbour's response to the friend in need and as the proper rendering of the Greek *anaideia*. The literal meaning of *anaideia* is shamelessness or avoidance of shame. Avoidance of shame makes sense in a culture where one would be shamed by refusal to help a neighbour who is unable to meet the demands of hospitality, especially where one could well find oneself in similar need some time. No one would dream of refusing such a request for help, whether for the sake of friendship or to avoid being shamed, not even those who let it be known that they resent having to get out of bed in the middle of the night.

The translation "persistence seems to derive from association with the repetition of seeking and searching and knocking, in other words with the sayings that form the third little cameo: "Ask and it will be given you...." Persistence in prayer is a desirable quality but it has nothing to do with the parable of the friend in need who asks only once for "three loaves" and can expect to receive them. Just so, God cares extravagantly for those in need and does so without too much prompting.