

**TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**Year C      October 20, 2013**

**THEME: The Widow Who Wouldn't Quit**

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The classic persistent person of prayer in our Christian tradition is without doubt a holy lady named Monica.

Those of you who went through Catholic schools with the good sisters as teachers no doubt heard of her often.

Others perhaps are not so familiar with her heroic history.

Either way her memory is worth remembering in light of Jesus' parable today.

Monica was born way back in 332 in North Africa – historically and culturally long ago and far away from us.

Yet her story revolves around family, motherhood, marriage and children – subjects that don't really change all that much.

There's some evidence that as a young woman, Monica had a problem with alcohol, but with an iron-will she would also demonstrate later in life she was able to conquer her addiction.

Raised in a well-to-do Christian family, Monica at an early age was given in an arranged marriage to a pagan husband with a violent temper, a man name Patricius.

With him she had three children, two of whom readily took to their mother's Christian faith.

Meanwhile, husband Patricius and second son Augustine mocked and berated that faith at every opportunity.

Monica kept praying, lighting candles, visiting the tombs of the martyrs, imploring religious figures to pray for her husband and her son.

Finally, after nearly twenty years of Monica's relentless prayer – and no little nagging, her husband Patricius, only a year before his death, became a Christian.

Not so Augustine, her son, a brilliant and promising young scholar, who had meanwhile gone off to school far from home.

There he had gotten involved in a strange religious sect as well as found himself a mistress and fathered a son to whom he gave the name Adeodatus which in Latin means "gift from god."

Monica redoubled her efforts: She continually fasted, prayed, and wept on Augustine's behalf.

She implored the local bishop for help in winning him over, and he counseled her to be patient and telling her in often quoted words: *"God's time will come. Go now, I beg you; it is not possible that the son of so many tears should perish."*

She also lectured and pestered the living daylights out of Augustine, as you can imagine; at one point refusing to let him stay at her house until he cleaned up his act.

Augustine received an invitation to Rome to lecture and study; he booked passage from North Africa for his mistress and son.

Monica fully intended to go along with them because she feared the negative influences of Rome on her son and grandson.

While his mother was in church praying at night, Augustine and his family boarded ship and slipped off to Rome without the endlessly nagging mother.

Monica, not to be thwarted, waited for the next ship and followed them to Rome.

Unfortunately, upon her arrival in the capital city, Monica found that her son had already left there for the northern Italian city of Milan.

This was to be, however, the most significant blessing of his life and of hers.

For in Milan, Augustine immediately came under the influence and friendship of the brilliant and holy bishop of that city, Ambrose.

Ambrose it would be who in just a few short years would fulfill the desire of Monica's thirty years of prayer by leading her son Augustine through the catechumenate and baptizing him at the Easter Vigil.

Such had been the persistence of this holy and determined mother, her son would return to North Africa where he would become a Bishop, one of the preeminent theological doctors of the early church and a universally acclaimed saint.

Monica, never made it home to North Africa.

When she and her family left Milan on the way home she became sick and just before she died she told Augustine: *"I do not know what there is left for me to do or why I am still here, all my hopes in this world being now fulfilled. All I wished for was that I might see you a Catholic and a child of Heaven."*

I've taken the time to tell Monica's story, St. Monica's story, because it stands on its own, but also because it shed light on the Gospel parable.

Jesus' parable is **"about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary."**

God's knows Monica must have grown weary over thirty years of relentless prayer for her husband and her son.

But, as is said, she kept on keeping on; she did not quit.

Hers is an example of how prayer often is a combination of our efforts and God's efforts: Monica giving an example, prompting and prodding and pestering first her husband and then her son.

God working mysteriously within each man heart as well as behind the scenes to have people in the right places at the right times for things to happen.

God could not take away the free will of Patricius or of Augustine and force faith on them just to answer Monica's prayer; God had to allow each to come to that decision on his own – perhaps with some pestering and prompting on the part of wife and mother.

St. Monica showed us that persistent prayer, un-wearying prayer is faithful prayer.

It always trusts God is doing God's part as long as we are doing ours.

It prays and prays and prays not to convince God to do something but to keep us keeping on, faithful to doing our part.

St. praying, persistent, pestering Monica: pray for us.