

There are days when it is just hard to pray. It's true of everyone – even ministers. You may have a very faithful habit of prayer, but on some days you just can't do it very well. You can't concentrate. You are worried about the family, debt, work or school. If you pick up a bible, a prayer book, or a rosary, you may find it's hard to do what used to come easily. I get distracted in my morning prayers almost every day just thinking about what food I'm going to eat later on.

When you're sick, you may also find it's hard to pray. Of course, it's hard to do much of anything then – work, cook, clean, or even be yourself when people are depending on your wisdom and love. You rely on other people to do the work for you and to pray for you.

Some people have a hard time praying because they don't pray very much at all. They've been out of the habit for so long that it's hard to get back into it.

Coming to church every week should help foster a habit of prayer, but even here there are always days when prayer comes hard. You can't hear, or the words seem repetitious, or you're annoyed by something else happening in the church. There are days you can't tell what the scripture readings are about, and the words of the hymns may seem a jumble. Even when we have the very best intentions to pray, sometimes we can't. It's hard. It takes concentration, and it takes the ability to relax. It means listening as well as speaking. It means reflecting in quiet as well as singing out loud. Prayer demands a lot of us human beings, and because we are human, we have days when we pray well and days when we don't.

Saint Paul tells the Romans that their prayer is probably more effective than they realize. The Holy Spirit prays for us when we cannot do it ourselves. Paul writes, "The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings."

We have no idea how much the Holy Spirit helps us out. Children have no idea how much their parents help them, and senior citizens have no idea how much their children help them. A good family creates an atmosphere of care that gets expressed in many ways that members never realize. It's the same with the Spirit, who knows what is best for us, what pleases God, and who prays when we don't know how. We all experience numberless blessings, and we cannot account for them all. We did not earn all the good that happens to us, but God's Spirit provides what is best.

The praying of the Holy Spirit does not excuse us from prayer. We still need to give it a good try. But when prayer is hard, all is not lost. Even when we are disappointed with the results, God is surely pleased with the effort. God can read the intentions of our heart, and that's all the Holy Spirit needs to intercede on our behalf and pray when we just can't.