

Everybody gets distracted, and there are two problems with it. One is that we should be thinking about the task at hand, whether it's our job, our homework, or our prayer. The other is that we may daydream about things we should not dwell on - our appetite for food, sex, or revenge. Whenever our brain shifts into neutral, it goes to some area where it takes delight. Sometimes we just think about people we love or happy memories of pleasant events. Those thoughts create a certain warmth within us that can keep us happy from one hour to the next.

A lot of people get distracted when they pray; even priests do. To concentrate on the entire mass is mentally very demanding for everyone. We know it's important to pay attention whenever we pray. Sometimes that's not hard at all, especially when something is going wrong in our lives. We are so consumed by a problem, a pain, or a loss, that we pray a lot about it. In those times, no one has to tell us the importance of persistent prayer. We know it without thinking about it, and we don't get distracted.

So when Jesus tells his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary, it must be because things are going pretty well for them. Otherwise, they'd already be on their knees day and night.

The parable is delightful: A widow badgers a judge to rule in her favor. He has a bad reputation, but he also holds authority. He finally gives in to get her to shut up, and to keep her from punching him in the nose. Jesus says, persistence pays off. The squeaky wheel gets the grease. He invites us to pray always.

Still, we all know, no matter how much you pray, you don't always get what you ask for. A lot of times we do, and we thank God for the gift. But at least from our perspective, prayer does not always work; some people abandon their faith because they prayed for something they never got. So why does Jesus invite us to pray always? I think it's not because the more we pray the more we get, but because the more we pray the more God gets. God gets our time, our attention, and an insight into our very selves. You want all the time and attention of people you love; well, God loves us; God wants our time and attention too.

In this parable Jesus never says how you should pray, just how much you should pray. There are many different techniques of prayer, and I'm sure you have tried some of them. Sunday mass is the most important prayer we offer. But it should be supported by prayer every day. Most commonly people say prayers when they wake up and before going to bed, and also before meals. Some Catholics say a rosary every day. Others read from the bible. Some use a favorite prayer book. Some sit in absolute silence for 20 minutes at a time, trying to empty their minds of all thought except for the presence of God. It matters less how we pray; it matters how much we pray.

When our minds are idle, we think about whatever gives us pleasure. God wants to be on the list. God loves you and wants to be what you think about when you get distracted. If you pray daily, it will be easier to pray always.