

Sometimes we make the wrong assumption about prayer. We assume people know how to pray like they know how to tie a shoe. But for a lot of folks, prayer is more like programming a vcr. It's easier to watch than it is to do.

Jesus spoke frequently about prayer. He taught us words in the Lord's Prayer; he set an example by praying alone. In today's parable, he motivates people to try it. If you teach someone how to use a vcr, you can describe the buttons, you can show them what you do, but at some point you motivate. "Come on! Think of all the great stuff you can see!" That's the tone of this parable on prayer.

The parable concerns a woman who badgers a judge till he renders a verdict. We admire the woman's bravery against her opponent and her in-your-face approach with the judge. But Jesus says when you address God, you don't need her attitude--God is not like this judge; God wants to help. Jesus urges frequent prayer and promises pleasant results.

OK, we're motivated; how's it done? Catholics pray in different ways. The eucharist is the beginning and the end of our prayer. It starts and finishes the week. Daily prayer will support the eucharist. Many people choose a specific time and place for private prayer every day. It can be anything--the rosary, the bible, or silent meditation. It doesn't always feel great, but by doing it daily we "exercise our prayer muscle" and build spiritual strength from day to day. Some meet in prayer groups and talk about the Sunday scriptures. Then certain occasions call for special prayer--holiday meals, for example, or travel. Sometimes the occasion for prayer isn't so happy; nothing makes people more religious than sheer terror. When sickness, tragedy, or danger comes, we pray. We change our style of prayer all through life. A child can pray very simply, but an adolescent grows more doubtful. Parents of young children have difficulty finding silence in their day, they often long for the prayer and simple faith of their youth; seniors generally find the rhythm of prayer fits their life more neatly.

Whatever our technique at home, our goal at church is to bring that spirit of prayer, our skills at prayer here to the Mass. When we hear the words, "Let us pray," it's like hearing, "Batter up!" or "Play ball!" What we've practiced on our own, now we do together. Jesus urges us to pray persistently, not just once a week, to a God who longs to hear from us and enjoys the companionship we give.