

What is one area of spirituality we should tune up today? St. Paul answered this in our second reading, “*We do not know how to pray as we ought.*” We all struggle with praying, so here are four solid tips to improve our attitude and approach to prayer:

**First, be humble.** Jesus said, “*I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike;*” that is the humble. Humility helps us remember who we are speaking to. After all, much of prayer is asking God for something, thus we are stating our neediness and dependence upon God as a Father. St. Paul told the people in Athens, “*In God we live and move and have our being.*” And God revealed himself in the burning bush to Moses as, “*I am;*” meaning God is the very fabric and possibility of our existence. It’s humbling to think that without God we would cease to exist.

**Second, be faithful.** St. Thomas Aquinas said, “*We need to believe that we can obtain from him what we seek.*” While Jesus promised, “*Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened.*” The only reason God would not give us what we ask for, said St. Augustine, is that we have asked too small. God has something greater in mind to give. Think of it this way: children can ask their parents for certain things and get a quick ‘no’, such as a request for too much sugary candy. But if a child asked for a vegetable or a hug, parents can’t deny a good request.

**Third, be a beggar.** Numerous Gospel stories depict people who were persistent beggars for Jesus to act in their lives. Think of Bartimaeus, that blind beggar who cried out, “*Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.*” When people tried to shut Bartimaeus up, he cried louder, “*Son of David, have pity on me!*” Then the Lord answered Bartimaeus, “*What do you want me to do for you?*” Or the story of the Pharisee and tax collector. The Pharisee prayed that he was glad he was not like the tax collector, while the tax collector stood at a distance with lowered eyes and beat his chest while praying, “*O’ God, be merciful to me a sinner.*” Jesus said the tax collector went home justified for whoever “*exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*” This is why traditionally Christians have prayed the Jesus Prayer throughout the day: “*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*” It is a combination of what desperate Bartimaeus cried out and the contrite tax collector prayed at the temple.

**Lastly, be at ease when distractions arise.** There is a funny story about St. Bernard of Clairvaux who was riding his horse up into the Alps to give a retreat, and as he passed a farmer along the road he heard a loud grunt. Then the farmer remarked, “*I envy you, with nothing to do but pray while I have to kill myself working in this rocky soil.*” Bernard said, “*Well, praying can be even harder work than digging around those stones.*” “*I doubt that very much,*” the farmer said, “*With that beautiful horse and the gorgeous saddle, what do you know of hardship?*” Bernard replied, “*It is a beautiful horse, isn’t it? I’ll tell you what, if you can say the Lord’s Prayer without taking your mind off it, I’ll give you this horse.*” So the man began praying, “*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be [he stopped, looked up and asked]...do I get the saddle too?*” We have active minds and busy lives, so expect distractions. When they arise in prayer, acknowledge them, perhaps write it down if you need to remember it for later, and then go back to your time with Jesus. St. Teresa of Avila said, “*Think of distractions as mere clouds passing in the sky, momentarily taking your gaze from the Sun of Righteousness...*”

These tips will help us pray as we ought because prayer is necessary to this life and the next. For St. John Paul II said, “*Prayer is ... the recognition of our limits and our dependence: we come from God, we are of God, and to God we return.*”

