



# Difficulties in Silent Prayer

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## The Three Characteristic Difficulties



### **Perseverance or**

How to find the time each day for the Lord?

### **Distractions or**

How to pray with who and what I am?

### **Lack of Consolations in Prayer or**

How to prayer when God hides?



## A Dance or A Battle?



- ❖ "God knows how to make it seem that going to prayer is like going to a **dance** and God knows how to make it seem like going to prayer is going to do **battle**."
- ❖ You can risk getting **discouraged** and even consider giving up if you feel that you are going to **battle** more often than going to a **dance**.
- ❖ Well, the difficulties are pretty much **unavoidable** but can be **real opportunities** for **growth** and **grace**! At least this is what I hope to help you grasp!



## First Difficulty: **PERSEVERANCE**

How to find time daily for prayer?



St. Teresa of Avila says you need to 'have firm resolve, a **determined determination**, not to stop before having reached the **source of living water** no matter what ... (W 21, 2).

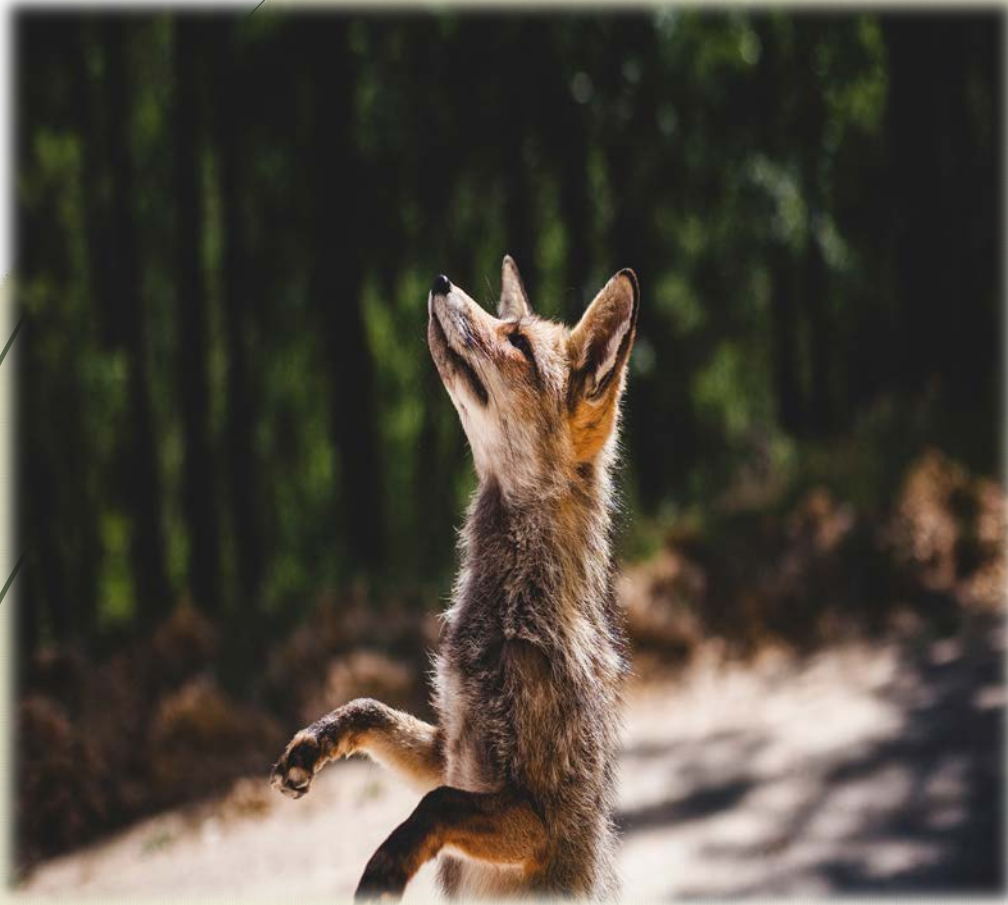
There are days when **prayer just doesn't fit**.  
**What's going on?**

Prayer would be possible **if** you were willing to engage in a sort of **combat**.

The question then is not '**how**' but '**why**' not '**how to find time to pray**' but '**why pray at all**'. The answer is an **act of faith**.



First Difficulty:  
**PERSEVERANCE**



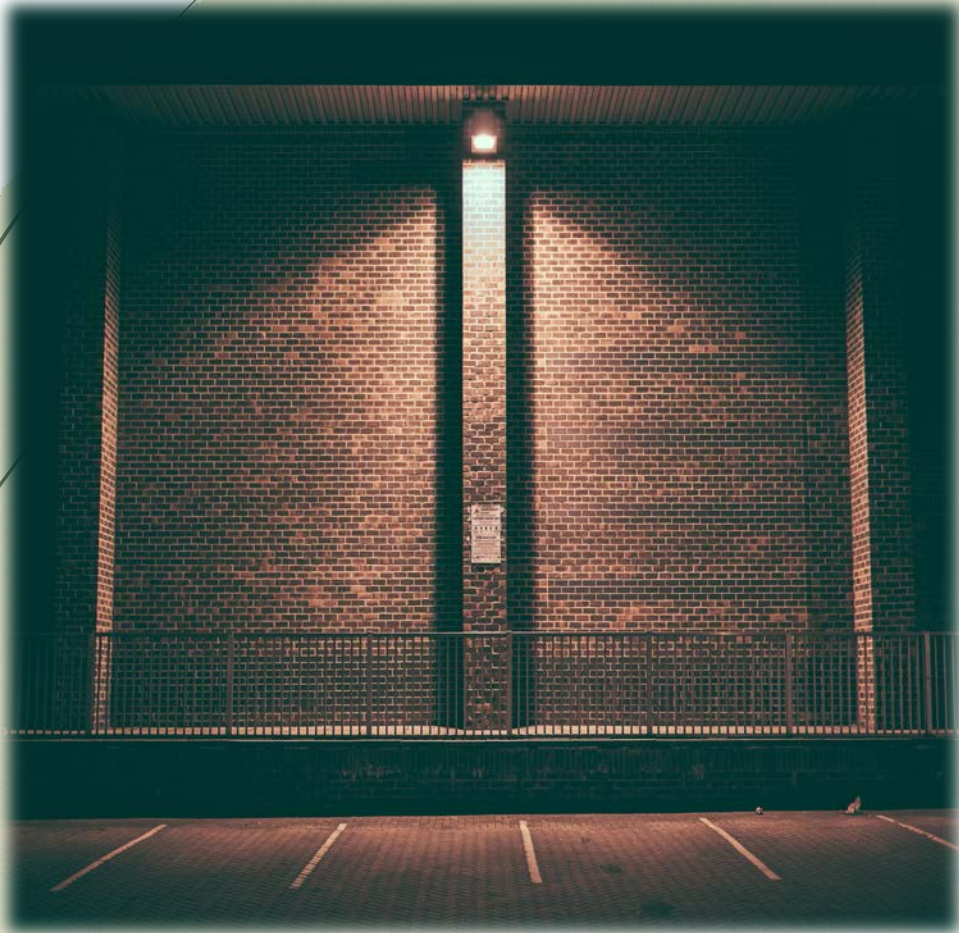
If I truly believe this then prayer will become my **priority**.

**Beg the Lord**, as did the father of the epileptic child of the Gospel, "Lord, I believe, help my disbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

... One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has time, **one makes time for the Lord** with a firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter..." ccc2710



## First Difficulty: **PERSEVERANCE**



Let's admit that the **challenge** of silent prayer is great.

It is important to realize that **union with God** is precisely what we are made for!

We can live our whole lives on the **surface**, very far from the **center** of our soul where God is found.

The whole **purpose of prayer** is to bring us back to the center.



## Second Difficulty: DISTRACTIONS

How to pray with who and what I am?



'A distraction, is simply thinking about something other than the Lord.'

'The distraction is a **lack of recollection**. Yet recollection is a prerequisite of silent prayer.'

Our effort in silent prayer is to learn to recollect ourselves through repeated **acts of faith**.



## Second Difficulty: DISTRACTIONS



What can we actually do when confronted with distractions?

There are **two different approaches** that work together.

**First: anticipate** the distraction

**Second: overcome** it.



## Second Difficulty: DISTRACTIONS



### Anticipate the distraction

Preventing distractions is a vast project.

To prevent distractions we have to develop **good habits** that will enhance recollection.

**Keep watch** over our thoughts and imagination while going about our daily lives.





## Second Difficulty: DISTRACTIONS



### Anticipate the distraction

"Protect your heart with **holy thoughts**,  
for holy thought will keep you."

But, how do we cover our heart with  
holy thoughts?

These **good habits** will bear fruit not  
only during prayer but will allow  
recollection to become the  
foundation of our lives.



## Second Difficulty: DISTRACTIONS

## Remedy the distraction

We can't control what happens to us in prayer.

We recollect ourselves, invoke the Holy Spirit, read a verse from the Gospel ...and then what happens?

We realize that we're a million miles away! So, what should we do?

"When we allow ourselves to be distracted the only remedy is to **recollect ourselves again.**" (IC 2,10)





## Second Difficulty: DISTRACTIONS



“Lord Jesus, Son of God have pity on me  
a sinner.”

‘My **book** was a companion for me, a  
shield against my many thoughts. (V4,9)

We can look at a **picture** or an **icon** or  
**pray a prayer** such as the Our Father  
or the Hail Mary very slowly.



## Second Difficulty: DISTRACTIONS



Let's **recap** all the different methods available to help promote recollection & keep us in a loving attention before Christ:

- ❖ a **Gospel** reading
- ❖ reciting a **verse** of a psalm
- ❖ invoking the **Holy Spirit**
- ❖ looking at a **picture** or an **icon**
- ❖ following the **breath** & thinking of it as the Holy Spirit,
- ❖ slowly **praying a prayer** such as the Our Father.



## Second Difficulty: DISTRACTIONS



A distraction can become **invasive**

The only **solution** is to put the issue in God's hands.

If my concerns return, I continue to give it to Him **over and over again** as many times as is necessary and I make it a prayer intention.

This makes me **poorer** and **prepares me to receive** what God wants to give me.



**Third difficulty:  
Absence of any tangible sign of  
God's presence**



“If I don't **feel** the presence of God, how can I be sure to recognize Him if I meet Him within?”

Our natural way of knowing is through the **senses**, but our senses are unable to feel God because God is not a sensory object. He is **Spirit**.

There is only one supernatural means that allows us to know God and it must be God Himself who gives it to us; that means is **faith**.



**Third difficulty:**  
**Absence of any tangible sign of God's presence**



"When God hides does prayer become useless as you say?"

Remember that we can only reach God by **faith** and not by **feeling**

Prayer is an exchange of friendship with God the one who we **know** loves us, not the one who we **feel** loves us

If He hides during your prayer time it is an invitation for you to grow in **charity**. He is inviting you to seek Him."



## Difficulties as God's Teaching Tools



If God allows us to be **tested** in this way don't you think that He is doing it for our good?

He's perhaps using our difficulties as **teaching tools** to educate and stimulate us.

Prayer teaches us to **detach from ourselves** for God's sake thus making me more available to love my **neighbor**.



## Difficulties as God's Teaching Tools



Through the **trial** of distractions God invites us to **strengthen** our faith.

"Faith is indeed the admirable means that enables us to reach the **goal**, in other words, God."

We need to believe that our **faith** enables us to **touch God**, to give Him to ourselves, mysteriously but truly!



## Difficulties as God's Teaching Tools



Through the trial of the absence of any tangible consolation in prayer, God **invites** us to be **hopeful** in prayer.

He hides to increase our **desire** for Him and therefore to increase our ability to welcome Him.

The more He wants to give himself, the more He makes Himself desired.

Our hope unfolds with great **patience**, first towards God, but then also towards ourselves.



## Difficulties as God's Teaching Tools



Through all these trials, God invites us to grow in **humility** as we become aware of our weaknesses, unfaithfulness and great poverty

This is a blessing because according to St. Teresa of Avila, "This **edifice** is built entirely on humility" (V 12, 4)

The difficulties encountered in the practice of prayer teach us, the **essential ingredient** of prayer, humility, which allows God to act in us.