

# Praying Without Ceasing

What is prayer without ceasing? Paul clearly says, “Pray without ceasing” in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. But how can one pray without ceasing? When our words end, is it possible to continue in prayer?

This idea has challenged theologians and mystics and all who have read this verse with a desire to grow closer to God in prayer. A couple of examples will suffice to start us on the way to an answer.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church there is the tradition of the Jesus Prayer. In a simple yet powerful book called The Way of the Pilgrim (1800’s) an ordinary man begins his quest after hearing the above scripture and ends up talking to a holy man who teaches him the Jesus Prayer, “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me a sinner” and has him repeat it over and over on a hundred bead rosary. As the pilgrim reflects more and more deeply on the words of who God is (“Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God”) and who he is (“have mercy on me a sinner”), he enters a place where the prayer echoes through his whole day and is always in his mind and heart. Indeed it becomes for him a constant prayer that fosters growth in God and helps him better relate to others.

The rosary is used by many as well. Especially by Padre Pio of Italy (1887-1968) who prayed the rosary constantly and was famous for hearing confessions for countless hours a day and saying masses that were attended by multitudes. Many miracles were attributed to the intervention of this saint but his constant prayer was the rosary that brought him into the presence of Jesus.

The Holy Name of Jesus is a devotion to continually remembering and saying the name of Jesus. Just the simple name of Jesus is a prayer that returns us to His presence when the distractions of the day take us away. Other phrases, “Jesus, help me” “Jesus, I trust you” “Jesus, I love you” and many more can be used. The goal is awareness and living in the transforming presence of Jesus.

One of the greatest and simplest examples of constant prayer would surely be Brother Lawrence (1600’s). He was merely a cook in a monastery in Paris, France. Yet he immersed himself in the presence of Jesus and sought to do all for the love of Jesus, whether cooking, washing a pot, or being at prayer time in his room. He famously said, “The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees before the Blessed Sacrament.” The book of his counsels and advice compiled from his letters to others is called The Practice of the Presence of God. He admitted this practice is not easy. “As often as I could, I placed myself as a worshiper before him, fixing my mind upon his holy presence, recalling it when I found it wandering from him. This proved to be an exercise frequently painful, yet I persisted through all difficulties.” Sometimes a difficult practice, yet infinitely beneficial.

So the road to constant prayer is directed by our reaching out for the presence of Jesus. However we best find this presence (Jesus Prayer, Rosary, Name of Jesus, All things done of the love of Jesus, or otherwise) we pursue closeness to Jesus who loves us and only wants the best for us.

By the grace of God I was allowed to see the Grand Canyon recently. It was an awesome natural beauty and work of God. Just the sight brought many to tears and was very emotional for me as well. The amazing wonder and immense size and scope of its grandeur can be overwhelming. Even as I thought about it at night in a cabin a few hundred yards away I felt the power of its amazing beauty. I was aware of its presence and awesomeness so near.

Similarly the presence of Jesus can affect us. The amazing love He has for us to suffer incredibly for all our sins through His intense desire for us to be close to Him draws us. If we are aware of the beauty of the Lord's it will affect us like the wonder of the Grand Canyon. If we see the depth and scope of the Lord's love and sacrifice for us, we can offer our little pains and inconveniences back to God for His love and for those who do not know His love. Then our good moments and painful moments have meaning. We can constantly offer them in thanks and for love of God. As we do this we enter more deeply in the presence of Jesus and experience the constant offering to Him that becomes constant prayer. Then we approach true prayer without ceasing. We grow in the practice of the presence of God as a means to constant loving prayer. Constant prayer is our way of living in the presence of Jesus so we may offer our life's joys, sorrows, happiness and difficulties so we gain strength from the presence of Jesus and say, "Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

So it may not be easy. It may be practiced differently by different people as God leads. But God is still calling us to, "pray without ceasing." Let us seek to enter in as best we can, with God's grace and guidance to the most fulfilling, rewarding and joyful pursuit of our life - daily seeking to follow the Lord in prayer, prayer that is without ceasing.