

Today was established by Pope Francis as the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly. As we remember the Joachim and Anne the grandparents of Jesus this week, we ask for blessings on all our grandparents and seniors.

In today's gospel Jesus goes to a certain place to pray. He seems to know the secret of where and how to converse with God his Father. The apostles see how important this relationship is in Jesus' life and they ask, "Lord, teach US how to pray." Let's take a look at how Jesus answers them with a prayer, a parable and through the eyes of a saint.

Jesus begins famously with the words of The Our Father. This prayer recognizes God as "hallowed" or greatly revered and honored. This reminds us of the great commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your strength." Everything in Jesus' advice hinges on this commandment.

Next, we hear a parable about persistence, where a friend fails to help HIS friend accommodate an out-of-town visitor, complaining that he and his children are already in bed. We are told, "if he does not get up to give the visitor the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence."

Persistence in prayer is essential. We come back, over and over to discuss matters with God, to sit beside our Lord and to present our needs day after day. The purpose of persistence may come across as trying to wear down God until we get our way. The truth is, God remains constant and our prayer is always an ordering of OUR life to God. St. Augustine says, "If God at times seems to be slow in responding, it is because God withholds what we are not yet ready for." We persist in our prayer in order to prepare our hearts to receive what the Father has in store for us.

The more we trust in God through prayer, the more he equips us in doing his will. We look to the saints for guidance in this area. Think about your favorite saints? I'm getting to know Padre Pio through a book my Mom gave me. He's a contemporary saint, who dedicated his life from a young age to

prayer. Father Gabriele Amorth says in the book, "Padre Pio lived to pray; prayer was his breath, his life. He was always absorbed in God." Over time, like Jesus, his relationship with God produced many fruits.

Padre Pio listened to confessions, at times 16 hours a day, and was gifted with reading the conscience of those who would come from around the world to confess their sins. They would wait in line for hours and come back over the course of time to learn from Padre Pio as they advanced in their spiritual journey.

Padre Pio suffered greatly in his life through medical challenges, spiritual battles with the devil and is one of a few priests who suffered from a stigmata (the wounds of Jesus). Through his suffering and prayer, he deeply understood the mystery of the mass. When asked to explain the Holy Mass, he replied, "The Mass is infinite, like Jesus." And he added, "The world could go on even without the sun, but it could not go on without the Holy Mass." During his masses he relived the Passion of Jesus. His masses lasted for an hour and a half or more as he and Jesus connected over the sacrament of the Eucharist. Many, priests and faithful, have come to understand what the Mass is only after attending the Masses of Padre Pio.

The saints offer us a wealth of knowledge and spiritual support both from their stories and their intercession from heaven. They have taken the answer to "teach us how to pray" as a quest in their lives. Let's go to them as we journey and as we grapple with building our relationship with God.

As it says at the end of the gospel, "God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." When we let the Holy Spirit conform our hearts to God, we begin to see Him working in our lives and answering our prayers.

As we think about our spiritual journeys and ask Jesus to teach us how to pray. Let's consider how we are using the tools of prayer and the inspiration of the saints to find God and his will for our lives.