



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



October 17, 2010—29th Sunday Through the Year
Fr. Augustine Wetta, O.S.B.

Sometimes it feels like Jesus spends half his time telling us to do the impossible, and the other half telling us how easy it's going to be. Well, today, he tells us to do two simultaneously impossible things. "Pray always," he says; and, "Pray without becoming weary" (Lk 18:1) Now there's a no-win situation for you. As if it weren't hard enough to pray without taking a break, Jesus wants us to do it without even getting tired.

Now, I am a professional prayer guy. A *professional*. And I consider myself lucky if, by the end of the day, I have managed to pray sporadically, to say nothing of the weariness. In fact, I can safely say that I have never met *anyone* who prayed *always*. So there must be a catch. A trick. There must be a secret to praying this way...and of course, there is. If you were listening carefully to our first reading from the Book of Exodus, you might have caught it. I didn't, because of course, I was too busy praying, but luckily, Saint John Chrysostom did catch the meaning hidden of Exodus 17, and since I always plagiarize his sermons, I shall now pass that hidden meaning along to you. The Israelites, you remember, were at war with the Amalekites, and so long as Moses raised his hands in prayer, they won; but whenever he lowered his hands, they would start to lose. So his two friends, Hur and Aaron (and by Hur I mean him. His name is Hur: h-u-r.) He and Hur—that is, Aaron and the other guy—stand next to Moses and hold his hands up *for him*. (Ex 17 8-13).

Saint John Chrysostom says that Moses here represents us—you and me—as we struggle to lift our arms in prayer. But since we are too weary to pray always, our brothers in Christ help to hold up our arms for us. But that's not all. Moses, his arms stretched out in prayer, also prefigures Christ, his arms stretched out on the cross, praying constantly and tirelessly *on our behalf* so that we who are battling it out here on earth may, by his ceaseless intercession, win the war against evil.

So praying ceaselessly *is* impossible. Praying tirelessly *is* impossible. Our weak human bodies, distractible human minds, and frail human souls will disappoint us every time. But if we remain "faithful to what we have learned and believed" (2 Tm 3:14), united to Christ's immortal, eternal, untiring body, the Church, then, even when we are distracted, even when we are depressed, even when our arms are weighed down by weariness—even then, we will still be praying. Because at any given moment, some Catholic in the world, is praying. Someone is saying mass. Someone is saying the rosary, singing the Divine Office, praying, giving alms, receiving the sacraments. Someone in the world is doing the prayer that we are too weak to finish on our own.

Which is why we Catholics are, first and foremost, a community. We depend on one another to complete in Christ what we could not complete by our own efforts. And for this reason, we take no prayer for granted—no Christian for granted, especially those who distress or offend us. One of my students once told me, "There's nothing worse than being helped by someone you don't like on something you don't want to do." The day may come when your faith is saved by the prayers of that loud neighbor who keeps you up at night, or that rude driver who cut you off on the highway. The day may well



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come—is likely to come—when you need his prayer; so give him no excuse to stop praying, even for a moment.

But know too that when even he fails, you may still depend on the prayers of Christ. “The Christian,” said John Paul II, “Knows that his prayer is that of Jesus; every prayer of his starts from Jesus; it is he who prays in us, with us, for us. All those who believe in God, pray; but the Christian prays in Jesus Christ: *Christ is our prayer!*” (Audience with young people, March 14 1979)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.