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Today is the feast of St Teresa of Avila. At prayer she often used an hour glass – which is the same as an egg timer except that it takes an hour for the sand to go through instead of three minutes. There were occasions she said, when the hour seems to drag on endlessly and she would try and shake the glass for the sand to go through more quickly. Goes to show that saints are human like the rest of us.

As with St Teresa when our prayer becomes tedious we shouldn't give up on it either. It also happens that when people don't get what they pray for, they can be tempted to drop it completely. Jesus says: "when you pray for something, believe that you have it already, and it will be yours". A few years ago a woman told me that she prayed hard for something but all to no avail. But then she added "Well, I knew from the onset I wouldn't really get it anyway" - so much for expectant faith. In the psalms it says: "see how he flags, he whose soul is not at rights". That flagging applies to prayer as much as to anything else.

But maybe we're not going about it the right way. The second reading today talks about the importance of Scripture and how it can teach us to become holy.

There are a myriad of recipe books round these days to help us improve our culinary skills. So also the good Book will help us develop our praying skills. St Jerome, who translated the whole Bible from Greek to Latin in the 5th century, said that "ignorance of the scriptures was ignorance of Christ Himself".

Nutritionists tell us that, if we want to stay healthy and lose weight we should eat smaller meals and chew every mouthful of food very thoroughly before swallowing. The same applies to the Word of God in prayer. It's best to read only a small portion of scripture, then put the book down and give ourselves plenty of time to 'chew on' the message.

But prayer isn't just a nice cosy feeling but a clarion call to

action. God wants you and me to be his hands, his feet, his ears, his eyes, in conveying His love to the world. Constancy in prayer sets us up to take on this task. As Delia Smith says in her book 'a feast for Advent', "prayer is a journey into love". Saint John Vianney used to tell his parishioners that there are only two things we need do in life in order to get to heaven – to pray and to love. You cannot have one without the other. Loving without praying is mere sentimentality, Praying without loving doesn't get us anywhere along the spiritual path. When the two are working in tandem everything changes for the better in our lives and those around us.

Constancy in prayer will ensure that our spiritual life does not seize up. It will keep us in tune with God so that we can be his worthy instruments in building up His Kingdom of love in the world.