

Today we are blessed with two very different but powerful women, Hilda, Abbess of Whitby †680, and Mechtild, Béguine of Magdeburg, Mystic, †1280. The first blessed the Church with new life and unity, yearned for the gospel of Christ, and she tried always to reconcile those who are divided.

Mechtild, wrote of mystical prayer:

*The Lord invites the soul to dance:
I cannot dance, Lord, unless you lead me.
If you want me to leap with abandon,
You must intone the song.
Then I shall leap into love,
From love into knowledge,
From knowledge into enjoyment,
And from enjoyment beyond all human sensations. There I
want to remain, yet want also to circle higher still.*

Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The flowing light of the Godhead*, translated and introduced by Frank Tobin (Classics of Western Spirituality 92; New York 1998), 59.

Both of these women were strong in their prayer-life, not that they found this easy, on the contrary!

There are times in our lives, we all find ourselves struggling with prayer, and feel that it has become dry and lifeless, and we are sometimes tempted to stop praying. When our prayer has become a struggle, it is good to remember that God knows our needs, and even knows what we want to say when even we don't seem to know. This is the time we need to just pray without worrying about it. When we find we can't keep our minds focused on the formal morning and evening prayers, as found in our

prayer book, it is perfectly acceptable to sit quietly and let silence be our voice.

Oddly, the struggle to pray can be a gift because the most important thing I need to learn is simply to be faithful. Like strengthening a muscle through repeated exercises, my heart needs some strength-training, and some days the weight is heavier than others. There are those times when prayer is joyful, rewarding and inspiring, but then there are times when it's like walking through thick mud and it feels utterly pointless.

It is a test of my faithfulness. It's the weight of the cross of perseverance. It will strengthen me if I can carry it. I don't have to run with it, only walk, and sometimes to stagger! But if I truly want to grow in devotion and holiness, like our two saints, I am obliged to struggle. There's no assurance that I won't fall or fail miserably - quite the opposite. Sure as the sun will rise, I will fall. I'll screw up. It doesn't matter. As a vowed person, I'm obligated to struggle anyway.

Devotion is proven during the hard times; the flat, stale, monotonous times. It's easy to fall in love, but staying in love requires great effort. God has heard me say I want to love Him more, and He obliges my request by giving me ample opportunities to prove it. It's up to me to push my weak heart to resist the complacency, excuses, distractions and come to Him in prayer.

Everyday God wants to enter into our hearts afresh, and requires only our permission and cooperation. This relationship does not require an emotional response, for, like in all relationships, we are not always open to an

emotional response. Being real with God is far more important than being emotional, since emotions can be contrived and fleshly. As in all relationships, there are times when we do feel moved by emotions, but the lack of such feelings in no way represents a lack of love for God, because God cares for us, and God knows we love him, even when suffering in those dry times.