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This month, we asked Sr. Regina: What is the most helpful advice you’ve received about prayer?

s a young Sister, earnestly trying to imitate the fervor of my more experienced companions, I found a line in a well-thumbed book: “Pray as you can, not as you can’t.” Zing! Through the years, other sage

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advice on prayer seemed to arrive just when I needed it. The latest entry is from writer Anne Lamott who distills centuries of good advice about prayer into: “Help – Thanks – Wow” – a pithy sound-bite worth unpacking.

HELP – The psalmist begs, “Show me your ways”; the disciples plead, “Teach us to pray.” The bottom line: we literally can’t pray by ourselves. Prayer is “not my job”; it is God’s work in us. God’s Spirit comes to help us in our weakness (Rom. 8:26), praying in, through and in spite of our struggling words and wordless struggles.

Asking for help is nothing to be ashamed of. Prayer need not wait until we have our act together. We can only pray as the persons we are; we need not pretend to be other. God loves us in our messiness, for our Creator made us works of art in process, unfinished through life’s turnings.

Julian of Norwich reminds us that prayer isn’t twisting God’s arm, but “laying hold of His willingness.” God who longs to lure us deeper into divine presence always waits for us to ask for help. Sharing our prayer journey with a wise guide can be a great first step.

Practice: Sit with your hands open, asking simply, “Help me.”

THANKS – Gratefulness, says Br. David Steindl-Rast, is the heart of prayer. All is gift. “All belongs to you, and you to Christ and Christ to God.” (1 Cor 3: 22b-

23) A tight-spun web of love, a seamless weaving, holds us fast and connects us with all times, all places, all beings. God is God, and I’m not – and isn’t that something to be thankful for?

Practice: Breathe IN God’s lavish, limitless gifts. Breathe OUT thanks.

WOW – “Wow” opens a path beyond words, a doorway into awe-filled wonder. It evokes an “Oh, my” response to a seaside sunset, a sleeping baby, a perching butterfly. It echoes the “Aha” of a liberating insight. Noticing these “sticky notes” from God demands that I slow down, turn from the petty complaints that can clutter my day, and open the eyes and ears of my heart. The prayer of “Wow” leads to the place of meeting a God in love with us.

“Behold God beholding you – and smiling!” invites Anthony DeMello, SJ. God takes delight in us, just as God delighted in Jesus at his baptism, or on Mount Tabor. Wow, indeed!

Practice: Be alert for God’s “sticky notes” today.