

THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

THEOLOGY:

Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 83: Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the entire community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise.

For he continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. She does this, not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by praying the divine office.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church: The Liturgy of the Hours

1174 The mystery of Christ, his Incarnation and Passover, which we celebrate in the Eucharist especially at the Sunday assembly, permeates and transfigures the time of each day, through the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, "the divine office."⁴⁶ This celebration, faithful to the apostolic exhortations to "pray constantly," is "so devised that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God."⁴⁷ [Morning Prayer, Mid-day Prayer, Office of Readings, Evening Prayer, Night Prayer] In this "public prayer of the Church,"⁴⁸ the faithful (clergy, religious, and lay people) exercise the royal priesthood of the baptized. Celebrated in "the form approved" by the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours "is truly the voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom. It is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to the Father."⁴⁹

1175 The Liturgy of the Hours is intended to become the prayer of the whole People of God. In it Christ himself "continues his priestly work through his Church."⁵⁰ His members participate according to their own place in the Church and the circumstances of their lives: priests devoted to the pastoral ministry, because they are called to remain diligent in prayer and the service of the word; religious, by the charism of their consecrated lives; all the faithful as much as possible: "Pastors of souls should see to it that the principal hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and on the more solemn feasts. The laity, too, are encouraged to recite the divine office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually."⁵¹ [Vatican II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 100]

Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 53 (1974): In accordance with the directives of the Council the *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* rightly numbers the family among the groups in which the Divine Office can suitably be celebrated in community: "It is fitting...that the family, as a domestic sanctuary of the Church, should not only offer prayers to God in common, but also, according to circumstances, should recite parts of the Liturgy of the Hours, in order to be more intimately linked with the Church."(118) No avenue should be left unexplored to ensure that this

clear and practical recommendation finds within Christian families growing and joyful acceptance.

54. But there is no doubt that, after the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, the high point which family prayer can reach, the Rosary should be considered as one of the best and most efficacious prayers in common that the Christian family is invited to recite.

John Paul II, Bangkok, 1984: I am pleased to know that special efforts are being made to make *the treasures of the liturgy* more accessible to the faithful. This will greatly nourish the spiritual life of the Church.... I hope that more and more lay persons will be able to share in the praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, which is the hymn of praise addressed to God by Christ and by the *whole Church*. This prayer of the Church belongs to all the People of God.

John Paul II, General Audience, March 28, 2001: *Psalter is ideal source of Christian prayer*

1. In the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* I expressed the hope that the Church would become more and more distinguished in the "art of prayer", learning it ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master (cf. n. 32). This effort must be expressed above all in the liturgy, the source and summit of ecclesial life. Consequently, it is important to devote greater pastoral care to promoting the *Liturgy of the Hours* as a prayer of the whole People of God (cf. *ibid.*, n. 34). If, in fact, priests and religious have a precise mandate to celebrate it, it is also warmly recommended to lay people. This was the aim of my venerable Predecessor Paul VI, a little over 30 years ago, with the Constitution *Laudis canticum* in which he determined the current form of this prayer, hoping that the Psalms and Canticles, the essential structure of the Liturgy of the Hours, would be understood "with new appreciation by the People of God" (AAS 63 [1971], 532).

It is an encouraging fact that many lay people in parishes and ecclesial associations have learned to appreciate it. Nevertheless, it remains a prayer that presupposes an appropriate catechetical and biblical formation, if it is to be fully savoured.

To this end, we begin today a series of catecheses on the Psalms and Canticles found in the morning prayer of Lauds. In this way I would like to encourage and help everyone to pray with the same words that Jesus used, words that for thousands of years have been part of the prayer of Israel and the Church.

Benedict XVI, General Audience, November 16, 2011: Dear friends, in these recent catecheses I wanted to present to you certain Psalms, precious prayers that we find in the Bible and that reflect the various situations of life and the various states of mind that we may have with regard to God. I would then like to renew to you all the invitation to pray with the Psalms, even becoming accustomed to using the Liturgy of the Hours of the Church, Lauds in the morning, Vespers in the evening, and Compline before retiring.

Our relationship with God cannot but be enriched with greater joy and trust in the daily journey towards him. Many thanks.

IN PRACTICE, an example: Psalm 57 from the breviary:

Ant. 1 Awake, lyre and harp, with praise let us awake
the dawn.

Psalm 57

Morning prayer in affliction

This psalm tells of our Lord's passion (St. Augustine).

Have mercy on me, God, have mercy
for in you my soul has taken refuge.
In the shadow of your wings I take refuge
till the storms of destruction pass by.

I call to God the Most High,
to God who has always been my help.
May he send from heaven and save me
and shame those who assail me.

May God send his truth and his love.

My soul lies down among lions,
who would devour the sons of men.
Their teeth are spears and arrows,
their tongue a sharpened sword.

O God, arise above the heavens;
may your glory shine on earth!

They laid a snare for my steps,
my soul was bowed down.
They dug a pit in my path
but fell in it themselves.

My heart is ready, O God,
my heart is ready.
I will sing, I will sing your praise.
Awake, my soul,
awake, lyre and harp,
I will awake the dawn.

I will thank you, Lord, among the peoples,
among the nations I will praise you
for your love reaches to the heavens
and your truth to the skies.

O God, arise above the heavens;
may your glory shine on earth!

Psalm-prayer

Lord, send your mercy and your truth to rescue us
from the snares of the devil, and we will praise you
among the peoples and proclaim you to the nations, hap-
py to be known as companions of your Son.

Ant. Awake, lyre and harp, with praise let us awake the
dawn.

Where can we find the Liturgy of the Hours if we want to pray it?

1. Full four-volume set: Catholic Book Publishing Co.
2. One volume: Catholic Book Publishing Co., Daughters of St. Paul. Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Night Prayer, for the annual liturgical cycle, with a selection of the Office of Readings.
3. One volume: *Shorter Christian Prayer*, Catholic Book Publishing Co. Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Night Prayer, for the four week cycle, with the more significant feasts of the annual liturgical cycle (much shorter than the preceding volume)
4. Monthly Magnificat issue: shortened version of daily Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Night Prayer
5. Electronic: *iBreviary* (free app, full Office for every day); *divineoffice.org* (full Office online, purchasable app: text and audio)

John Paul II, *Psalms and Canticles: Meditations and Catechesis on the Psalms and Canticles of Morning Prayer*, Liturgy Training Publications, 2007.

John Paul II and Benedict XVI: *Psalms and Canticles: Meditations & Catechesis on the Psalms and Canticles of Evening Prayer*, Catholic Truth Society

A valuable companion to the Liturgy of the Hours: John Brook, *The School of Prayer: An Introduction to the Divine Office for All Christians* (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 1992). Introduction to the Office with a commentary on all psalms and canticles for Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.