



LITURGY OF THE HOURS

CONSECRATING THE DAY TO GOD

“The liturgy of the hours or divine office, enriched by readings is principally a prayer of praise and petition.

Indeed, it is the prayer of the Church with Christ and to Christ”.

(General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours, 1:2)

The Liturgy of the Hours is an official prayer of the Church by which a day is consecrated to God. The Liturgy of the Hours of the Latin Rite is also called the Divine Office.

The hours at which the Liturgy of the Hours is celebrated are known as the Canonical hours. The inspiration to do this may have been fulfillment of David's words, "Seven times a day I praise you" (Ps. 119:164), as well as, "the just man meditates on the law day and night" (Ps. 1:2). By the end of the fifth century, the Liturgy of the Hours was formed having evolved to seven hours known as: (1) Matins (*during the night*), now called the Office of Readings. (2) Lauds or Dawn Prayer (at dawn); (3) Terce or Mid-Morning Prayer (Third Hour = 9a.m.); (4) Sext or Midday Prayer (Sixth Hour = 12 noon); (5) None or Mid-Afternoon Prayer (Ninth Hour = 3p.m.); (6) Vespers or Evening Prayer ("at the lighting of the lamps"); 7. Compline or Night Prayer (*before retiring*)

Today **contemplative communities**, whose lives are dedicated to prayer, pray the traditional seven hours at the various times of the day; **apostolic communities**, whose day is organized around ministry, typically pray Morning and Evening Prayer

The liturgy of the hours, like other liturgical services, is not a private matter but belongs to the whole Body of the Church, whose life it both expresses and affects.

Liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharist

To the different hours of the day the liturgy of the hours extends the praise and thanksgiving, the memorial of the mysteries of salvation, the petitions and the foretaste of heavenly glory that are present in the eucharistic mystery, "the center and high point in the whole life of the Christian community." The liturgy of the hours is in turn an excellent preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist itself, for it inspires and deepens in a fitting way the dispositions necessary for the fruitful celebration of the Eucharist: faith, hope, love, devotion, and the spirit of self-denial.

Is the Liturgy of the Hours for everyone?

Yes, all are encouraged to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. In the last millennium, the Liturgy of the Hours was prayed mostly by the clergy and religious. But this was not so in the first millennium. In the early Church, all Catholics frequently prayed Lauds (Morning Prayer) and Vespers (Evening Prayer).

In this new millennium, Pope John Paul II was trying to get all of us, with due regard to our personal state in life, back to that original, daily practice of praying the Liturgy of the Hours with the Church, in addition to Holy Mass.

When the fathers of the Second Vatican Council sought to reform the Sacred Liturgy, they not only touched upon the Mass, they also ordered that the Liturgy of the Hours be revised. Their hope was that it would become the prayer of the whole People of God again. The Second Vatican Council devoted a whole chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy to promoting the Liturgy of the Hours.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church re-echoes what the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council noting:

- 1. the splendor of praying the Liturgy of the Hours
- 2. that the Liturgy of the Hours is the "prayer of the whole People of God " --- priests, religious, and laity
- 3. that the Psalms need to be better understood
- 4. that the Liturgy of the Hours is an extension of the Mass and is harmonious with other forms of liturgical and private prayer.

What is the difference between liturgical and private prayer?

Liturgical prayer is the official prayer of the Church. Examples of liturgical prayer are the Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, the other sacraments, such as Baptism and Penance, and other liturgical rites, such as funerals. These prayers are officially approved by the Church. They are the prayer of the whole Church, the very voice of Jesus Christ praying to the Father. Where ever you are, when you pray the Liturgy of the Hours and say "O God come to my assistance," we express our awareness that it is God who enables us to pray. We stand before the throne of the Father in communion with all of the saints and angels and our own lips give voice to the voice of the whole Church and to Jesus Christ praying to the Father.

Private prayer, though absolutely vital to the spiritual life, does not have this status. The role of private prayer is important because it makes our faith personal. Ultimately, though, it is to support and lead to liturgical prayer. Both are to work in harmony, always remembering that, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, liturgical prayer is "far superior" and should not be replaced by private devotions which should be in harmony with it as noted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

1675 These expressions of piety extend the liturgical life of the Church, but do not replace it. They "should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some way derived from it and lead the people to it, since in fact the liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them."