

## **THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS:**

Often, I have been asked by friends or others, including Secular Franciscans, to explain what is the Liturgy of the Hours and how they might adopt this prayer as part of their daily prayer life.

A good part of this presentation is drawn from the book by Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV - *Praying the Liturgy of the Hours - A Personal Journey* [A Crossroad Book The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2014]

Fr. Gallagher asks the basic questions – “Can the Liturgy of the Hours, with its hymns, psalms, readings, and intercessions, become the prayer of every Christian—priest, religious, and layperson?

Can it bring new energy into our spiritual lives? Should we consider adopting it? Should I consider adopting it? All of it? Part of it? If we already pray it, can we be renewed in this prayer? Learn more about it? Find ways to pray it with greater richness?” [p. 10]

He goes on to state that over the years he has come to realise that “ordinary spiritual experience is the most important. Peak moments occur a few times in our lives. In general, however, the spiritual life consists of ordinary experience with its daily joys and struggles, daily efforts to pray, and daily striving to love God and others. How we live this “ordinary” experience determines everything in our relationship with God.” [p.10f]

He further points out that “when ordinary spiritual experience is expressed in words, new paths open in our lives of faith.”

And “when the ordinary experience of praying the Liturgy of the Hours is described in words, this prayer no longer appears remote, a practice reserved to a

few, but becomes possible for all. Struggles, too, in this prayer, when shared, weigh less. And above all, the fruit of this prayer, when expressed, strengthens hope.” [p.11]

Fr. Gallagher rightly notes, what I am sure we are already aware of, namely that “Every spiritual story is individual.” Our lives are shaped by our particular vocation as religious, priest, secular Franciscan and our by our specific circumstances of place, time, and personality.” [p.11] None of this is universal! Yet that most of the struggles and blessings experienced in praying the Liturgy of the Hours are common to all.

The Second Vatican Council taught with great emphasis that the Liturgy of the Hours is a prayer for the entire people of God. May it be for those who pray it or those who might pray it in the future, a rich source of spiritual growth.

### **What Is the Liturgy of the Hours?**

SINCE THE OLD TESTAMENT times when they were written, people of faith have loved the Psalms. Devout Jews turned to these 150 prayers in times of joy and sorrow, of peace and desperate need. Jesus knew, quoted, and prayed the Psalms; in him, the fullness of divine revelation, the Psalms acquired their deepest meaning.

The early Christians likewise prayed them and, when the persecutions of the first centuries ceased, gathered for this prayer in their churches.

In the Psalms, they found prayers of confidence in God: “The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. . . . If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would, I fear. You are there with your crook and your staff” (Ps 23:1).

Through the Psalms, like Jesus, they cried to God in times of affliction: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? You are far from my plea and the cry of my distress” (Ps 22:2).

With the words of the Psalms, they expressed hope in God: “The Lord is my light and my help; whom shall, I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; before whom shall I shrink?” (Ps 27:1); and deep longing for God: “Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God” (Ps 42:1).

When they had strayed and sought conversion, the Psalms supplied the prayers they needed: “Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness. In your compassion blot out my offense” (Ps 51:3).

And when their hearts rejoiced in God, again the Psalms provided the words: “My soul, give praise to the Lord; I will praise the Lord all my days, make music to my God while I live” (Ps 146:1–2).

A psalm, wrote Saint Ambrose, is “a cry of happiness.” A psalm, he continued, “soothes the temper, distracts from care, lightens the burden of sorrow. It is a source of security at night, a lesson of wisdom by day. It is a shield when we are afraid, a celebration of holiness, a vision of serenity, a promise of peace and harmony.”

“Day,” Saint Ambrose affirmed, “begins to the music of a psalm, [and] day closes to the echo of a psalm.” [Office of Readings, Saturday, Tenth Week in Ordinary Time, Second Reading, The Liturgy of the Hours, vol. 3, 347–48.]

Saint Athanasius declared that “the psalms seem to me to be like a mirror, in which the person using them can see himself, and the stirrings of his own heart; he can recite them against the background of his own emotions.” [Office of Readings, August 21, Second Reading, The Liturgy of the Hours, vol. 4, 1337].

In the renewal following the Second Vatican Council, the term “Divine Office” was retained and continues to be used. The more specific “Liturgy of the Hours” replaced it, however, as the preferred title.

The Liturgy of the Hours differs, however, from other liturgical prayer precisely as a prayer of the hours. The Mass, for example, though unparalleled in its spiritual richness, is celebrated at one moment in the day; the Liturgy of the Hours provides liturgical prayer throughout the entire day: morning, midday, evening, and night.

It is the Church’s greatest gift to hearts that long for prayerful communion with God throughout the day. This prayer is for all in the Church. Priests and deacons pray the Liturgy of the Hours by mandate of the Church and religious according to the directives of their constitutions. “The laity, too,” Vatican II taught, “are encouraged to recite the Divine Office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually.” [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 100]

Electronic and shorter printed versions abound, rendering the Liturgy of the Hours widely accessible. [*iBreviary* and *divineoffice.org*]

The renewed Liturgy of the Hours offers five daily times of prayer: Morning Prayer, to be said as the day begins; Daytime Prayer, to be said in late morning, midday, or mid-afternoon; Evening Prayer, to be said in the evening; Night Prayer, to be said just before retiring; and the Office of Readings, a longer and more meditative prayer to be said at any convenient time during the day.

Morning and Evening Prayer, depending on how they are prayed—alone or in a group, with or without singing, and so forth—may take ten to fifteen minutes.

***Morning Prayer*****Introduction**

## Dialogue

“God, come to my assistance.” / “Lord, make haste to help me.”

“Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. /

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen. Alleluia.”

[*the final "Alleluia" is omitted only during Lent*]

## Hymn

**Psalmody**

## Psalm

Antiphon (*presider alone*)

Psalm (*alternating A/B*)

“Glory to the Father...”

[Psalm Prayer - *optional*]

Antiphon (*repeated by all*)

## OT Canticle

(*same sub-structure as first Psalm*)

## Psalm

(*same sub-structure as first Psalm*)

**Word of God**

## Reading

(*pause for silent reflection*)

## Responsory

Gospel Canticle: ***Benedictus*** (Canticle of Zechariah)

Intercessions: Invocations

(*optional: add personal intentions*)

## Our Father

**Conclusion**

Concluding Prayer

Dismissal

(*by Clergy: “The Lord be with you...”*)

(*by Laity: “May the Lord bless us...”*)

***Evening Prayer*****Introduction**

## Dialogue

“God, come to my assistance.” / “Lord, make haste to help me.”

“Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. /

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen. Alleluia.”

[*the final "Alleluia" is omitted only during Lent*]

## Hymn

**Psalmody**

## Psalm

Antiphon (*presider alone*)

Psalm (*alternating A/B*)

“Glory to the Father...”

[Psalm Prayer - *optional*]

Antiphon (*repeated by all*)

## Psalm

(*same sub-structure as first Psalm*)

## NT Canticle

(*same sub-structure as first Psalm*)

**Word of God**

## Reading

(*pause for silent reflection*)

## Responsory

Gospel Canticle: ***Magnificat*** (Canticle of Mary)

Intercessions: Petitions

(*optional: add personal intentions*)

## Our Father

**Conclusion**

Concluding Prayer

Dismissal

(*by Clergy: “The Lord be with you...”*)

(*by Laity: “May the Lord bless us...”*)

The two “hinge” (principal) hours, Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, follow essentially the same pattern. After an invocation of God’s help and a brief prayer of praise, the hour begins with a hymn.

The Liturgy of the Hours may be prayed in many settings; in each, it will bless the day.

Most deeply, the Liturgy of the Hours is our sharing in “the hymn of praise that is sung through all the ages in the heavenly places.”

When the members of a closely united family gather, each delights in the love, goodness, and talents of the others and finds suitable ways to express that delight. In the Triune God, this delight in the Others is experienced to an infinite degree.

With a gladness that knows no bounds, each rejoices in the love, goodness, wisdom, and self-giving of the Others.

From this mutual joy is born a “hymn of praise” that is “sung through all the ages” in the eternal communion of the Trinity.

When one of these Persons became man, for the first time that eternal hymn of praise was sung in this world by a human heart and on human lips. Jesus, the Word made flesh, willed that his people join in that hymn of praise.

Our praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church tells us, is a sharing in that eternal hymn of praise.

“We do not know how to pray as we ought,” Saint Paul writes, but “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” and “himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Rom 8:26).

The Spirit takes our weak, limited prayer and lifts it to Jesus, our Mediator with the Father. Jesus unites this prayer with his own, enriching it beyond all measure in power, efficacy, and beauty, and so presents it to his Father.

This, the Church affirms, occurs every time we pray the Liturgy of the Hours; this is the root of its unique dignity as prayer and the source of its power in our lives. Such is the Liturgy of the Hours.