



Word on Worship

Newsletter of the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark, NJ

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During Lent

“**B**less me Father, for I have sinned, it has been four weeks since my last confession. These are my sins: I missed my morning and evening prayers several times, I cursed and got angry at least seven times, I told a lie to get out of trouble...etc. For these and all my sins I am very sorry.”

While the words you just read could represent an individual’s confession of sins, there is a sin mentioned that most parishes could include among their sins of omission. “Bless me Father, for we have sinned, we missed our morning and evening prayers.”

THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

In this article I would like to discuss the morning and evening prayers that the Church calls us to pray, not just as individuals, but as Christian communities. I would like to discuss the Liturgy of the Hours, in particular Morning and Evening Prayer.

Among the liturgical reforms mandated by the Second

Vatican Council was the reform of the Divine Office or Roman Breviary, or as we call it today the Liturgy of the Hours. Before the Council these prayers were almost exclusively the domain of the clergy and religious communities. It was not uncommon, for example, to see priests reading their Office as they strolled around the parish property, or to know that Sister had to leave the school building for the convent chapel by 4:00 PM to take part in community prayer. In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the Council Fathers called for the reform of the Office and asked that the laity be encouraged to take part in this prayer by which the whole Mystical Body of Christ publicly praises God. (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 99, 100)

FOR ALL THE PEOPLE OF GOD

In response to this call of the Council, the Roman Breviary was thoroughly revised. The new “Breviary,” now called the Liturgy of the Hours, was promulgated in 1970, issued in 1971, and the English translation was published in the United States in 1974. In promulgating the Liturgy of the Hours, Pope Paul VI wrote, “Now that the prayer of the Holy Church has been renewed and entirely revised in accordance with its very ancient tradition and in the light of the needs of our day, it is supremely to be hoped that the Liturgy of the Hours may pervade and penetrate the

whole of Christian prayer, giving it life, direction and expression and effectively nourishing the spiritual life of the people of God.... We have, therefore, every confidence that an appreciation of that ‘unceasing’ prayer which our Lord Jesus entrusted to his Church will take on new life.... The Hours are recommended to all Christ’s faithful members....” (*Apostolic Constitution of Promulgation, The Divine Office*, Pope Paul VI, November 1, 1970, 8)

This call for the Liturgy of the Hours to become part of the prayer of all the Church was strongly stated in the *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, “Where possible, the principal Hours (namely, Morning and Evening Prayer) should be celebrated communally in church by other groups of the faithful. The most important of these groups are the local parishes – the cells of the diocese – established under a pastor acting for the bishop. These represent in some degree the visible Church established throughout the world.” (*General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* GILH, 21)

NOT YET PART OF PARISH LIFE

Despite the hope expressed by Paul VI and echoed in the General Instruction, in most cases, the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, has yet to become part of parish life. In fact, most parishioners are

“WE MISSED OUR MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS”

unfamiliar even with the term and inexperienced in celebrating this particular form of liturgy. I believe this is the case for several reasons:

- Those responsible for preparing the liturgy have little extra time to undertake new tasks.
- These same people have had limited or no personal experience with celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours.
- The Liturgy of the Hours is still understood as being the province of the ordained and of those in religious life.
- The Liturgy of the Hours is considered too complicated and too wordy for the average congregation.
- The daily schedule of parishes is already filled with Masses.
- Priests have no desire to add responsibilities to days already burdened with pastoral work.
- Liturgies without the distribution of Holy Communion are considered lacking and inadequate.

If the Liturgy of the Hours is to take hold in our parishes then we will have to address those issues.

PART OF THE LITURGY

Since the Second Vatican Council priests, liturgy committee members, and others with liturgical responsibility have given a great deal of time and energy, not to mention blood, sweat, and tears, to introducing and maintaining the reformed rites in the parish. The liturgy of today requires far more than one individual saying the right words and performing the proper ritual actions. Good liturgy requires the assistance

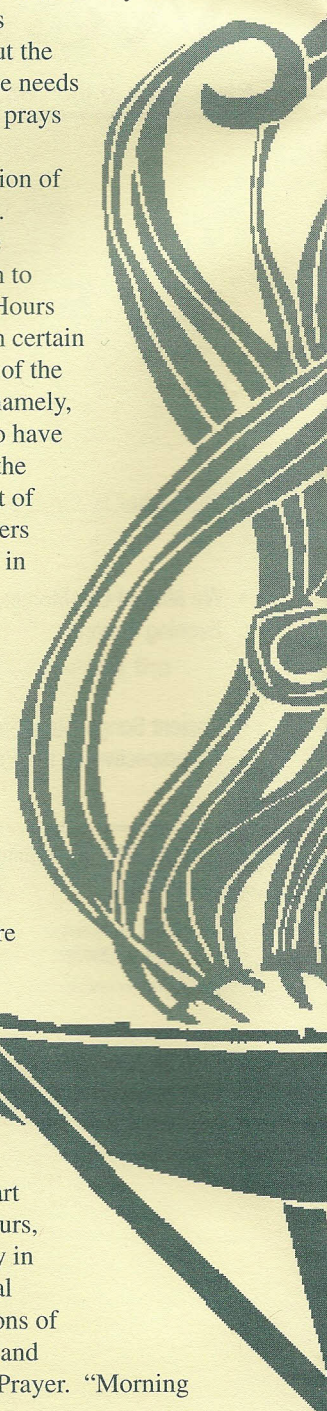
of various ministers trained and motivated for their role in the celebration. It requires the talents of liturgical musicians. It requires presiders and preachers who are skilled in their ministries. It requires an assembly aware of its need to be fully involved and active. It requires an appreciation of the liturgical year and its calendar. It requires sensitivity to the needs of the assembly gathered for prayer, and it requires preparation of the environment. To meet these requirements for the liturgical celebrations currently taking place in our parishes takes much time and energy. Understandably there is resistance to add more to the schedule. Yet if we take seriously the direction given us by the Church we will realize that the Liturgy of the Hours should be part of the parish schedule. Like the Mass and the celebration of the sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours is part of the official prayer of the Church and as such it must have a place in the liturgical life of the parish.

“Public and common prayer by the people of God is rightly considered to be among the primary duties of the Church. From the very beginning those who were baptized ‘devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the community, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers....’ (Acts 2:42) The custom soon grew of assigning special times to common prayer, for example, at the last hour of the day, when evening draws on and the lamp is lighted, or the first hour, when night draws to a close with the rising of the daystar.... This kind of common prayer gradually took shape in the form of an ordered round of hours.” (GILH, 1,2)

This ordered round of hours, rooted in the tradition of the Old Testament, is the way the Church fulfills the command of its Lord to pray unceasingly, the way it offers continual praise to God, the way it intercedes throughout the day for the needs of all and prays for the salvation of the world. While the obligation to pray the Hours rests upon certain members of the Church, namely, those who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders and those in solemn religious vows, as we have seen, all

members of the Church are

invited to take part in the Hours, especially in communal celebrations of Morning and Evening Prayer. “Morning and Evening Prayer are therefore to be reckoned as of the highest importance, as the prayer of the Christian Community. Their public and communal celebration should be encouraged....” (GILH, 40)



IT TAKES CONVINCING

However, before Morning and Evening Prayer can be implemented, those

responsible for doing so, namely, pastors, parochial vicars, pastoral associates, liturgy committee members, parish musicians, and other liturgical ministers must themselves be convinced of the value of this prayer.

This can come about through education. Reading the *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, and such works as *Morning and Evening Prayer, A Parish Celebration* by Joyce Ann Zimmerman, (Liturgy Training Publication, 1996) can

spark the interest and understanding of those who direct parish liturgy. But even more importantly, such people can be persuaded of the value of the Hours by taking part in good liturgical celebrations of the Hours. For me that happened during the 1993 meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions held in Rochester, New York. At that four day event devoted to

the Liturgy of the Hours, it was not the talks that I found most persuasive, though they were very fine, but the liturgical celebrations of the Hours that occurred during the course of the conference. Experiencing the power of the liturgies was the strongest argument I heard for making the effort to initiate the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours in the local parish. Diocesan Worship Offices or Liturgical Commissions should be able to provide the names of places where persons responsible for parish liturgy can go to experience good celebrations of Morning or Evening Prayer. Such experiences will be more effective than simply reading about the Liturgy of the Hours, and they will make the dry bones of liturgical theory take on flesh and come to life.

I believe that the reluctance of many to introduce Morning and Evening Prayer into their parishes is due to the inadequacy of many of the liturgical celebrations they have attended. Too often Morning and Evening Prayer is simply the recitation of a series of words, without music, without gesture, without assisting ministers, without an appropriate environment, without a theological understanding of what is taking place. At times, even hymn texts are recited rather than sung. No liturgy that appears to be a meaningless stream of words read from sheets of paper will stir the hearts or the efforts of those responsible for parish liturgy.

ESSENTIALS AND STRUCTURE

The Hours are celebrations spaced through the course of the day during which the Christian community assembles as the living Body of Christ to join Christ its Lord

in giving praise and worship to the Father and interceding for the needs of the Church and the world. The essential elements of these celebrations are psalmody and intercessions. The key times for these celebrations in a parish setting are morning and evening. (GILH, 37, 40)

Morning Prayer, prayed at the start of day, praises God for the gift of a new day, asks that the day be consecrated to God, and recalls the resurrection of the Lord, the true light of the world who enlightens the hearts of all people. (GILH, 38)

Evening Prayer, celebrated as the light begins to fade, thanks God for his help and presence during the day, recalls the evening sacrifice of Christ at the Last Supper and on the Cross, and asks that we remain steadfast as we wait in hope for the coming of the Lord. (GILH, 39)

Both Morning and Evening Prayer have a similar structure.

- A brief introduction or call to worship.
- A hymn related to the theme of the particular hour or to the feast or season.
- Two psalms and a canticle (A canticle is a psalm-like composition taken from the Old Testament at Morning Prayer, and from the New Testament at Evening Prayer.) These are related to the theme of the hour or to the feast or season.
- A short reading from scripture, which can be replaced by a longer reading from the Lectionary. A gospel reading is not used since the gospel canticle is employed in later.
- A time of silence or a homily which is optional.

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- A short response which highlights an idea from the reading.
- A gospel canticle, that of Zechariah at Morning Prayer, that of Mary at Evening Prayer.
- Intercessions that conclude with the Lord's Prayer. The intercessions at Morning Prayer commend and consecrate the day to God and ask God's help for all people. (GILH, 181) The intercessions at Evening Prayer follow the pattern used at Mass. The final petition is always for the dead. (GILH, 186)
- A blessing and dismissal that can follow the pattern of the concluding rite of Mass.

If you look at the structure, it is somewhat similar to the liturgy of the word at Mass. There is an introductory rite which includes a hymn. There are readings from the Old Testament, generally from the Psalms. Then a gospel, either the Cantic of Zechariah or Mary taken from Saint Luke. Intercessions follow, and the liturgy concludes with the Our Father, a final prayer, and dismissal.

While this rite may seem long and complicated when it is first being studied or introduced, once used for a period of time, it becomes as ritually familiar and comfortable as the liturgy of the Mass. Further, there are adaptations which can simplify the rite. Such adaptations might be worthwhile to consider when first introducing Morning and Evening Prayer, or when only a short period of time is available for prayer. However the basic elements of these hours, namely, psalmody and intercessions, must be maintained.

For example, a simplified

Morning Prayer might include: a call to worship, a hymn, one psalm, a scripture reading, a time of silence, the Cantic of Zechariah, the intercessions, and the Our Father followed by a concluding rite.

SONG ESSENTIAL

At any celebration of the hours, adapted or not, singing is essential. Without song, these liturgies become tedious and wordy. If possible there should be a cantor or song leader to guide the assembly in song. The hymn should obviously be sung. The psalm(s) should also be sung. A simple way for this to be done is to use the responsorial method employed for the psalm during the liturgy of the word at Mass. In this way the people need sing only a simple antiphon. The Gospel Cantic can also be sung responsorially. There are also versions of these canticles set to familiar hymn melodies known to most congregations. The intercessions might also be sung by the cantor and the people could respond with a sung "Lord, have mercy," or "Lord, hear our prayer."

In addition to singing, there should also be bodily movement. Liturgy is not just sung or spoken word, it involves the whole person. People should stand for the introductory verse and hymn. Sit for the psalms and reading. Stand for the gospel cantic and for the other parts of the liturgy.

Proper ministers should also be employed for these celebrations, namely, presider, cantor, reader, and perhaps a server to hold the book for the presider. The assembly should be prepared for its ministry in the celebration. This could be done by a few words of explanation before the start of

the liturgy or by appropriate directions and explanations in the worship aid.

A WAY TO START

When starting something new, it is wise to start slowly. The same is true when it comes to introducing Morning and Evening Prayer into the parish. A way to start would be to begin using these prayers at parish gatherings and meetings. For example, a parish staff that meets on Friday mornings could begin its meeting with Morning Prayer. A pastoral council or finance committee that assembles on Monday evenings could pray a simple version of Evening Prayer to open the meeting. The parish choir could begin its weekly rehearsal with Evening Prayer. This would not only introduce the choir members to this prayer of the Church, it would also train the choir members to serve as cantors at parish celebration of the Hours. If the parish has a school, the teachers and students could begin to use a simplified version of Morning Prayer to start the day. If there are religious education or sacramental preparation programs that meet in the late afternoon or evening, then a simple Evening Prayer could be used to close each gathering.

Once groups have become accustomed to this form of prayer, parishes might then move to scheduling such prayer at special occasions or during particular seasons of the liturgical year. For example, a parish might have a weekly celebration of Evening Prayer during the Advent/Christmas and the Lent/Easter season. While it would be most appropriate to have such celebrations on Sunday evenings, it might be better to

begin on a weekday evening. Since people have already come to church for Sunday Mass, it is difficult to get them to return the same day for another service.

As people become comfortable with praying the Hours and experience its beauty and its power in their lives, additional celebrations could gradually be added to the parish calendar. Remember, God has blessed us with the gift of time. We do not have to rush quickly into making the Liturgy of Hours a daily part of parish life. Doing things slowly and well, will provide a strong foundation on which we can build in the future.

PASTORAL CARE

In parishes where schedules are already filled with Masses and with other spiritual activities, and where rectories are far from full and staffs are burdened with responsibilities,

there could be strong objections to adding Morning and Evening Prayer to the schedule. "We are already doing enough." "Who has the time?" "The people have never asked for it." "They won't come, they're too busy." "They won't understand the Liturgy of the Hours."

However, if the Liturgy of the Hours is an official part of the Church's prayer, and it is, then we do not have the option of not making it available to the people. Just as it is not our option to decide if our parish will celebrate Mass, or baptism, or the anointing of the sick, or reconciliation, so it is not our option to decide not to celebrate this prayer of the Church.

We also need to appreciate that bringing people together for prayer, that celebrating with them the liturgies of the Church, is part of the pastoral

care we owe them. Just as it is important to visit the sick, to see to the administration of a parish, to collect food for the poor, to teach people about the Bible, to counsel people in distress, so it is important, and even more important, to assemble them as the priestly people of God to join Christ the Lord in giving praise and worship to the Father and interceding for the salvation of all the world.

Once we understand that, once we see the importance of the Liturgy of the Hours, then as individuals and as a parish we will never have to say, "Bless me Father for we have sinned, we missed our morning and evening prayers."+

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DOING IT RITE

The Saints During Lent

Solemnities and feasts are celebrated as usual.

Memorials of the saints are not celebrated during Lent.

The saints may be **commemorated** during Lent as follows:

AT MASS

The opening prayer of the saint may replace the opening prayer of the Lenten weekday.

The scripture readings are always those of the Lenten weekday.

The prayer over the gifts and prayer after communion are always the prayers of the Lenten weekday.

The Lenten Preface is always used (except with Eucharistic Prayers that have their own proper preface).

The color is always violet.

IN THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

AT THE OFFICE OF READINGS

After the second reading (with its responsory) from the Lenten weekday the readings of the saint (with its responsory) may be added with the concluding prayer of the saint.

AT MORNING AND EVENING PRAYER

The ending of the concluding prayer may be omitted and the antiphon and the prayer of the saint may be added.

ANCIENT SONGS — NEW STRENGTH

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE PSALMS

When David took flight from Saul in his madness, the first place he came to was Nob. Here on the eastern slope of Mt. Scopus, just one mile northeast of the ancient city of Jerusalem, the priests had moved the objects of cult after the destruction of the sanctuary of Shiloh (Jer 7:14). David feigned being on an urgent, secret mission from the king. He had left with no time to take a weapon. Now among the sacred treasury of that sanctuary was hidden the very sword that young David had taken from Goliath to cut off the giant's head (1 Sam. 18:51). Once apprised of David's plight, the priest Ahimelech offered David that sword; and David gladly accepted.

David's words, "There is nothing like that one; give it to me," (1 Sam. 21:10), evoke the romance of a brighter day. David now homeless remembers the hero's victory that once secured his welcome

in the royal presence. The young shepherd had refused Saul's armor and sword to fight Goliath. But now the fugitive fearing for his life willingly takes the sword of Goliath. Its memory arouses his courage and strengthens his resolve in his present difficulty.

Indeed, there are certain memories that individuals cherish. These are the experiences that affect the person so strongly that they can unlock new possibilities as time rolls on. A crisis overcome, a temptation resisted, a commitment loyally kept in the past; these can reawaken hope and inspire new strength. The moment returns. The memory impels. The person exclaims, "There is nothing like that one, give it to me." And what is true of the individual is also true of the Church. There are treasured memories that strengthen her to face each new crisis.

The Church's recollections indeed are ancient. They stretch far back beyond Pentecost to the days when the Spirit moved David. The New Israel has gratefully inherited from Israel of old the rich patrimony of those memories in the Psalter. From the very beginning, the Church has continually returned to the experiences enshrined in this inspired poetry. Here in the prayers that went from the lips of Israel to the heart of God, the Church has found a privileged way to interpret her suffering, express her praise, and experience new life on her

pilgrim way.

The Church learned the value of the psalms from Jesus himself. The Psalter played a major role in the religious devotion of Jesus. It was the prayerbook he used and the hymns he sang in temple worship. Strengthened by their use, he overcame temptations in the desert (Ps 91:10-12 in Mt 4:5-7). Instructed by their wisdom, he quoted them in his teaching (e.g. Ps 37:11 in Mt 5:4; Ps 78:2 in Mt 13:34; Ps 118:22-23 in Mk 12:10-11). In the final hours of his life, he sang the Hallel (Pss 113-18) after the Last Supper (Mt 26:30); and he prayed the psalms from the altar of the cross (e.g. Ps 22:1 in Mk 15:34; Ps 31:5 in Lk 23:46; Ps 69:21 in Jn 19:28).

From earliest times, the Church followed Jesus' example. Her song-writers modeled her great hymns on the psalms (e.g. Lk 1:46 ff; Lk 2:29 ff). Her earliest preachers returned to the psalms for strength in times of persecution (Acts 4:25 ff). They used them to expound their faith and show its continuity with the whole of God's revelation (e.g. Acts 2:25 ff; 13:33; Heb 1:16, 10-3; 10:5-7).

However, like the piece of cloth in which the sword of Goliath had been wrapped, the present form of the Psalter can hide from some the strength within. The psalms were collected over centuries. Around a core of Davidic psalms (3-41), similar songs



and poetry gathered. But the final arrangement is not haphazard. It betrays the editor's hand pointing the attentive observer to the powerful purpose of the psalms in religious piety. The very structure of the Psalter as it now is reveals the reason why both individual believer and believing community still voice their prayers with the psalms.

Psalms 146-149, all of which begin with "hallelu yah" (Praise the Lord), it forms a final doxology that gathers up and re-echoes all the sentiments voiced within the Psalter. These concluding notes in Israel's symphony of praise sound out loud and clear the very purpose of the Psalter: it is a means to praise God. In the first two-thirds of the Psalter, the psalms are replete with thanksgiving, petition, contrition, and adoration. But in the final third of the Psalter, the voice of praise predominates. And it is with praise the Psalter comes to conclusion. Here is a clear reminder that all prayer is to lead to praising God. No wonder then the Hebrews deliberately entitle the entire book of psalms, "Tehillim," the nominal form of the verb to praise (*hallelu*). The community of faith can find no better way to praise God than with these inspired songs.

Since the psalms have been received into the canon of scripture, these prayers are now part of divine revelation. But what once began as Israel's word to God has now become God's word to all his people. The final editors of the Psalter have arranged the psalms so as to make this point. With deliberate intent,

they have mimicked the division of the Torah. As the Torah has five books, the Psalter has five parts. In other words, the Psalter is "Torah". And to emphasize this, the editors have placed Psalm 1 as the introduction to Psalter. This psalm coming from a wisdom teacher in the post-exilic period extols the Torah as life-giving and urges the believer to study, meditate, and live life according to its dictates. Placed first, this psalm previews what is yet to come. Like the Torah, the psalms that follow it contain instructions, directions, and guidance. They speak of God and life; of human conduct and its outcome; of the world and the place of God's people in the world. All the themes of salvation history found scattered throughout the scriptures are contained within the Psalter. It is truly 'the Bible within the Bible.' As "Torah" the psalms are to be studied and heeded in their wisdom. They are manna in the wilderness. They are bread for the hungry. Their truth gives life.

By the time the Psalter received its final form, the Davidic monarchy had long lost its political power. Yet, immediately after Psalm 1, the final editors placed the messianic Psalm 2. The wisdom teacher's voice falls silent. The king now prays. This son of David whom God places on Zion prays for God to extend his rule over all the earth. This prayer of the newly-enthroned anointed of Yahweh pleads for the fullness of God's blessing in every psalm that follows. For these are not ancient prayers of Israel's pious, long dead. Sinners weeping tears of repentance; the wronged crying out for justice; the sorrowing seeking comfort; the saints in thankful praise —

these psalms are the voice of the mystical Christ heard in every time and place.

Here is the remarkable beauty of the psalms. They help us frame our thoughts and feelings in ways that are truly inspired. The psalms do teach us theology. They do instruct us as they speak of God, of community, of the just and the wicked. But more than anything else, they open a privileged door that gives us access to the inner sanctuary of God's chosen people at prayer. They allow us to stand there, whether alone or gathered as Church with others and there join in a liturgy that voices our praise and protest, our petition and contrition, our thanksgiving, joy and adoration. The psalms give us the words that reach from our lips to the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus.

In the Book of Revelation, John sees Jesus, faithful and true, and "from his mouth... a sword" (Rev. 19:15). From the lips of Christ in his Body the Church come forth each day — the psalms. They are the sword of the Son of David at work in the world. Once Goliath's sword brought renewed strength to David and set him on the road to establish his kingdom. Today the psalms, faithfully prayed and lived, empower all God's people in the mission of establishing God's final reign in Christ on earth.+

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