



Prayer Our Human Desire for God

Prayer of the Whole People of God: Liturgy of the Hours

It is the rare and blessed school where the term "Liturgy of the Hours" is not met with blank stares or furrowed brows. Many adults, too, have never had the opportunity to pray the prayer of the Church: the Liturgy of the Hours. So this article is intended for catechists who want to expand their prayer lives by praying with the Church across the world, following a tradition that has penetrated both East and West for 16 centuries or more. If catechists could lovingly embrace this long tradition of prayer, just think of the creative ways they might imbue their students with a love for this liturgical prayer that connects us day by day to the Paschal Mystery—the mystery of Christ Jesus in his act of salvation for us.

The Prayer of the Church

The *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours* (GILH), paragraph 2, states: "This 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." It is the way that the Church tries to be faithful to the command of the Lord: "Pray always." The GILH links the praying of the Hours to the celebration of 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.'" Praying the Liturgy of the Hours gives the gathered community the opportunity to frame each day with God's presence, love, and blessing.

The Hours, by set forms and regular rhythms, extends the prayer of Christ across the day. Our Catholic way of praying finds its solid path to the Father through the Son with the Holy Spirit. Our prayer, from one perspective, is acceptable because it is the prayer of Christ.

"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.

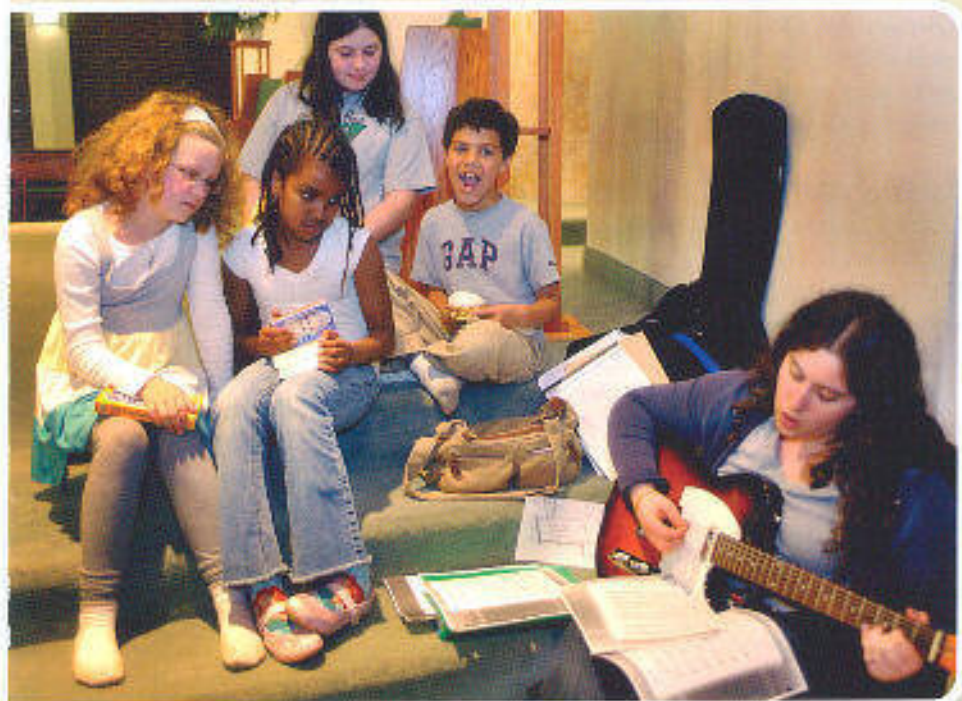
"For He continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. This she does not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by the divine Office."

When we gather in Christ's name and are assured that he is indeed present among us (see Matthew 18:20), our



This is the sixth article for this year's course in The University of Dayton Catechist Formation Program in association with CATECHIST magazine. By reading this and the other six articles in the series and meeting specific requirements, you could earn a continuing education unit or a graduate credit from The University of Dayton. For more information, contact Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHS, at angela.Zukowski@notes.udayton.edu.

Gerald Chinchar, SM, D.Min.



prayer and intercession become one with the prayer of Christ in his Paschal Mystery: "He not only died for us—he rose from the dead and there at God's right hand, he stands and pleads for us" (Romans 8:34).

Since the Church's prayer is Christ's own prayer, what we do and say in prayer is highly important. Not just any text, any gesture, or any posture will do. The way we pray expresses the way we believe; the way we believe shapes the way we pray. *Lex orandi, Lex credendi*.

Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer

The hinge hours of the Office occur at dawn and dusk. In our modern day, that translates into the beginning of our day and the time we

wind down from our day. Morning Prayer, or Lauds, has always had the primary theme of praise and thanks for the rising sun which reminds us of the Rising Son who brought our salvation and new life. The new day brings new opportunity, and so it gives us a moment to praise God and reconsecrate ourselves to living as members of the kingdom, filled with grace, mercy, and forgiveness as we work for justice.

Evening Prayer, or Vespers, gives us time to light a candle and remember that Jesus is the true light of the world, the One who banishes all the darkness of sin from our world and our lives. As the day ends, we look back with repentance on misdeeds and ask for strength for the future. "Placing our hope in that Sun which

never sets, we pray and beg that his light may shine on us again; we pray that Christ may come bringing the grace of eternal light."³

Elements of the Hours

The prayer of the Hours is structured around four main elements, with additional subelements added for extra emphasis or intentionality. The main elements in the Hours are Hymns, Psalms, Readings, and Prayers.

Hymns: The Hymns of the Liturgy of the Hours give a lyrical dimension to the prayer. A hymn is a poem, usually of several stanzas. The text is crafted in such a way as to reflect the meaning of the hour of prayer that the community is celebrating. Sometimes the morning or evening hymn is also flavored by the liturgical season. Generally, these are not the same hymns that would be sung at Mass, as they would reflect notions of the beginning (Morning Prayer) or ending (Evening Prayer) of the day. An excellent source of hymn texts appropriate to the Liturgy of the Hours can be found in GIA's *Hymnal for the Hours*.

Psalms: Psalms form the heart and core of the Liturgy of the Hours. Monastic communities pray all of the psalms, spread over a certain number of days. Parish communities and small groups who desire to pray the Prayer of the Church use a selection of psalms that is more manageable,



depending on their experience with the psalms and time available to pray. (See the appendix of *Hymnal for the Hours* for recommended shortened Psalters.)

Prayers: We offer intercessory prayer in the psalms, with specific kinds of intercessions—at Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer—as modeled in the Office book. In morning intercessions we ask that we might be mindful about consecrating the day to God. In evening intercessions we ask for forgiveness of our sins, for an experience of salvation, and for the needs of the Church. Intercessions for the local community may be added to either hour.⁶

Appreciating the Psalms

Because psalms form the largest portion of the Liturgy of the Hours, it is important to help your students or parishioners appreciate them. Start with easy psalms; some are easier to pray than others. Not every psalm is used in the current Liturgy of the Hours, and not every verse is included in the psalms that are used. It falls to us, teachers and leaders, to do our homework before we jump in with teaching the psalms.

A simple exercise would include carefully reading all the psalms listed for both Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, and noting the numbers of the ones that struck you as easy. Note, too, if they are for morning or evening. Make a short list of those that you will use at Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer—and use these for a good amount of time, until the assembly is ready to move on to more.

The use of antiphons and psalm prayers with the psalms enhances our prayer by making poetic and evocative connections with the saving mystery of Christ across the liturgical seasons and feasts.⁷

Not every psalm is easily accessible the first time you read it. But that is not a reason to give up on the psalms. The Psalms are the prayer book of the Bible for both Jews and Christians, and have been for thousands of years.

There are many good books on the Psalms that can help you in your prayer and reflection. Three of my favorites are listed in the appendix to *Hymnal for the Hours*.

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina is a time-honored method of prayer often used as an extension of praying the Hours in the morning or evening. *Lectio divina* means “holy reading.” *Lectio* is rooted in our Jewish reading and honoring of the Scriptures as God’s word to us. It was developed as a method in monastic communities. Today, most people who spend time in daily personal prayer use the *lectio* method or some variant.

Prepare to enter *lectio* by using a breathing exercise whereby your body and mind are calmed. Take a deliberate and long breath (remembering the Holy Spirit who desires to fill your heart), hold it for a count of three (in honor of the Holy Trinity), and slowly let your breath out to a mental count of eight. Repeat this two or three times, and then progress in the following manner:

Read: Once your mind is cleared and your body slowed, turn to a psalm or other Scripture passage (often the Gospel of the day). Read just a bit of the passage.

Ponder: Savor and dwell on that passage. Think of its richness, challenge, or implications.

Pray: Ask for a blessing because of what the text says to you, repent of what the passage might accuse you, thank God for the grace that you recognize therein, or just praise God.

Rest: Finally, rest with the insight of the word and the movement of your heart in prayer. When you find yourself thinking of something else, continue on to the next portion of the chosen reading.



Readings: While there is a reading in each hour of the Office, these readings are usually quite brief and not the length of a reading at Mass. Readings at the Office are never taken from the Gospels, as a selection of the Gospel is a permanent part of Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Night Prayer in the form of a sung canticle. (When we find a psalm-like passage in another book of the Bible, the Church has traditionally called these poetic pieces “canticles.”) While at solemn celebrations of Lauds or Vespers it may be appropriate to have preaching, in the normal course of praying the Liturgy of the Hours, we simply offer praise and intercession with short periods for personal reflection.

Photo by W.P. Wittman Limited



Praise Be to Our Gracious God

To the God of Glory and Majesty. To the God who stands in our midst at all times and in all seasons. To the God who is worthy of our best worship. To the God ever ready to hear our fervent pleas. To our gracious God be all glory and honor and praise for ever!

Prayer, Readings, Music, Gesture

If you are at all interested in teaching your constituents how to pray better, bone up on some of the readings I have suggested herein. Start with the basics of Hymns, Psalms, Readings, and Prayers, using resources from the suggested books and the Liturgy of the Hours book. Become familiar with the main theme and purpose of both Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.

Start simply, and don't use only words. While it may seem like an extra complication, remember that the Liturgy of the Hours is a real liturgy of the Church. As such, it is best celebrated with music and gesture. The new document from the bishops about music in divine worship⁴ stresses the values the Church experiences in singing and points out the many ways that singing can happen within the Hours. Taking time to prepare regular celebrations of the Hours, like lesson planning, is sometimes seen as an unpleasant obstacle to the real work of catechesis. But good preparation—in all dimensions—will bring forth the sweet and beautiful fruit of the Church at prayer together.

Notes

1. The term "Liturgy of the Hours" is the common term used in the Roman Catholic Church for the official prayer of the Church that occurs at regular intervals throughout the day. There are other terms that are often used for this tradition of prayer: Divine Office, Daily Prayer, Daily Office, and the Breviary. Further, the individual hours sometimes have multiple names, e.g., Morning Prayer = Lauds = Morningpraise.
2. Luke 18:1.
3. *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours* (GILH), paragraph 12. Translated by Peter Coughlan and Peter Purdue. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1971.
4. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 83. Walter M. Abbott, SJ, General Editor.
5. GILH, paragraph 39.
6. For more detail, see GILH, paragraph 179ff.
7. For more detail, see GILH, paragraphs 110-112.
8. *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*. Issued by the USCCB, November 14, 2007. Available online at uscbb.org/liturgy/SingToTheLord.pdf.



Fr. Chinchar is a Marianist priest, a native of Cleveland. He has been at the University of Dayton for 25 years working in Campus Ministry, especially with RCIA and sacramental preparation with college students.

Study Guide

Fr. Gerald Chinchar's article is the sixth in our series on Christian Prayer. This article offers a clear and basic understanding of the importance of the Liturgy of the Hours within our Catholic tradition. Chinchar offers an appreciation of how the Hours, by set forms and regular rhythms, extends the prayer of Christ throughout the day. He points out that the way we pray expresses the way we believe; the way we believe shapes the way we pray.

Chinchar weaves into his article the link of the Hours with the Eucharist and, finally, how *lectio divina* can complement our praying the Hours. If you have not experienced the Liturgy of the Hours, this article is a welcoming invitation to become engaged.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What has been my experience with the Liturgy of the Hours?
2. How is the Liturgy of Hours meant to inspire a sense of the presence of God throughout the day?
3. How would I explain the relationship of the Liturgy of the Hours with the Eucharist?
4. Chinchar states: "The way we pray expresses the way we believe; the way we believe shapes the way we pray." How would I describe this in/for my own life?

Exercises

1. If you do not have a Liturgy of the Hours book, go to google.com or amazon.com to discover more about the Liturgy of the Hours online. Purchase one of the many copies available; or go to magnificat.com to acquire a simple and modified edition for your prayer.
2. Pray Morning Prayer and/or Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours for one week or one month. Or invite a few family members or friends to join you once a week for either prayer.
3. Introduce your students to the Liturgy of the Hours.

