

Sydney College of Divinity

**The Liturgy of the Hours**

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## The Liturgy of the Hours

This paper presents an analysis of the Liturgy of the Hours, followed by a thematic commentary which also addresses the liturgical spirituality. Taft presents a perspective on *spirituality* and *liturgy* that is held in this paper, namely: “The purpose of the spiritual life is to ‘put on Christ’, so that, as St. Paul says, ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’ (Gal 2:20). And this life is created, fed and renewed in the liturgy.”<sup>1</sup>

In practising the Liturgy of the Hours, this author uses the *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary*.<sup>2</sup> For clarification, it should be noted that:

[It] is not to be confused with any officially authorized edition of the Roman Catholic *Liturgia Horarum (Liturgy of the Hours)*, whether in the complete four-volume version or the one-volume version *Christian Prayer* currently available. Rather, this volume of texts for daily prayer stands in the tradition of *A Short Breviary*, first published by the monks of Saint John’s Abbey in 1941, which sought to provide the English-speaking world with an *unofficial* vernacular edition of the Divine Office for those who sought to pray with the Church in a more simplified manner.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning Today* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986), 346.

<sup>2</sup> Ron Lewinski, “Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part II”, *Assembly* 33:2 (March 2007): 13. Lewinski notes that we “need better materials to make the Hours easier to use.” For this reason, I have chosen to use the *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary*. He goes on to write that “my experience is that the laity don’t want a watered down version of the Hours, but they do want something they can use without getting confused and frustrated. They need something that won’t cost \$100 for four volumes.” From my perspective, the *Benedictine Daily Prayer* fulfills well what Lewinski is recommending.

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell E. Johnson and others, comps. and eds., *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), v.

### **An Analysis of the Liturgy of the Hours**

The Liturgy of the Hours (or Divine Office) is the official set of daily prayers prescribed by the Catholic Church to be recited at the canonical hours by the clergy, religious orders, and laity.<sup>4</sup> After a hymn, there is always psalmody, then a long or short reading of sacred Scripture, and finally prayer of petition.<sup>5</sup> Integral to the Liturgy of the Hours is the community manner of prayer.

Therefore, a foundational two-fold question in this analysis is (1) whether the Scriptures reveal a community nature of prayer for the Body of Christ, the Church; and, (2) can a set cycle of hours be supported.

When the community of believers is first mentioned in the book of Acts, they are described as having “all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1:14).<sup>6</sup> They were all one in heart and mind (Acts 4:32).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Christ had stated: “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Mt 18:20), indicating a special merit in the prayer of the community.<sup>8</sup> (Of course, private prayer is also necessary and is practiced by the members of the Church through Christ in the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup>) In sum, the New Testament attests to the early Christian community *praying together* (see also Acts 2:42; 4:24; 12:5, 12; Eph 5:19-21).

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<sup>4</sup> For this basic, introductory definition I have used, as an exception, the following on-line source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy\\_of\\_the\\_Hours](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy_of_the_Hours)

<sup>5</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours: Congregation for Divine Worship*, #33, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDWGILH.HTM>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, #9. Note: In this paper, the New International Version of the Bible is used for all Scriptures quoted.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Christ himself took part in public prayers: in the synagogues on the Sabbath (Lk 4:16); in the temple which he called a house of prayer (Mt 21:13); and in meal settings where he used the traditional blessings of God (Mt 14:19; 15:36; 26:26; Lk 24:30).<sup>10</sup> He also joined with the disciples in singing a hymn (Mt 26:30).<sup>11</sup>

In different places, it became the practice to assign special times for common prayer, such as the last hour of the day when evening draws on and lamps are lighted, or the first hour when night draws to a close and the sun rises.<sup>12</sup> Over time, other hours were sanctified by prayer in common, seen by the Fathers as foreshadowed in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>13</sup> For example, the book of Acts records how the disciples gathered together at the third hour (Acts 2:1-15); how Peter went up on the roof to pray at the sixth hour (Acts 10:9); how Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer, at the ninth hour; and how at about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God (Acts 16:25).<sup>14</sup> Gradually, such prayer in common took the form of a set cycle of hours, and the associated liturgy was mainly prayer of praise and petition, enriched by readings.<sup>15</sup> The *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours*, however, does not offer historical references to substantiate how common prayer developed into the form of a set cycle of hours.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., #4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., #1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., #2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., #1-2.

Finally, Psalm 119:164 may be offered as a biblical affirmation for the Liturgy of the Hours. The psalmist expresses: “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.”<sup>17</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours follows this numerical pattern: (1) Vigils, (2) Lauds, (3) Terce, (4) Sext, (5) None, (6) Vespers, and (7) Compline.<sup>18</sup>

### **A Commentary on the Liturgy of the Hours**

In this section, the following aspects which undergird the Divine Office are commented on: structure of the Liturgy of the Hours, morning and evening prayers, and the use of the Psalms. Comments on other facets of the Divine Office include: reading of sacred Scripture, link with the Eucharist, sanctification of God’s people, consecration of time, praise to God with the Church in heaven, priesthood of Christ, petitions and intercessions for the world, and a wellspring for the Christian life.

#### Structure of the Divine Office

The essential structure of the Liturgy of the Hours is a conversation between God and his people.<sup>19</sup> Its ecclesial nature makes the Divine Office preferable for celebration in common rather than individually in private.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, it belongs to the whole Body of Christ,

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 1172.

<sup>18</sup> Universalis Publishing Ltd, “The Structure of the Liturgy”, <http://www.universalis.com/n-liturgy-structure.htm> Note: There was one more office, Prime, which came between Lauds and Terce – however, it was abolished in the reforms of 1970. After the major reforms of 1970, some additional revisions were made to the Liturgy of the Hours in 1985 (in the decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship, dated 7 April 1985).

<sup>19</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #33.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

whose life it both expresses and affects.<sup>21</sup> Lay groups gathering for a particular reason can help fulfil the Church's duty by celebrating part of the Liturgy of the Hours.<sup>22</sup> In the liturgy, God the Father is adored in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23), and in such public prayer and worship all humanity is reached which contributes to the salvation of the whole world.<sup>23</sup> Finally, when a family (the domestic sanctuary of the Church), celebrates some parts of the Liturgy of the Hours, it will also enter more deeply into the life of the Church.<sup>24</sup>

While the *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours* conveys the corporate character of the early Christian practice of prayer, the practice of praying with the Church and as the Church, apart from praying at Mass, still presents a real challenge today.<sup>25</sup> Lewinski, in his two-part article, "Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish" tells the story of a group of men in his parish that began praying the Liturgy of the Hours and the numerous spiritual benefits they discovered.<sup>26</sup> He offers three strategies for bringing the Divine Office to all of God's people: (1) catechesis on prayer, (2) catechesis on the Psalms, and (3) integrating the Hours into parish life.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., #20.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., #27.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> P. Bradshaw, "The Historical Foundations of the Liturgy of the Hours", *Assembly* 32:4 (July 2006): 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ron Lewinski, "Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part I", *Assembly* 33:1 (January 2007): 3-5, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Lewinski, "Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part II", 13, 16. Lewinski gives an overall positive assessment when he writes that "in light of all the limitations we face in the average parish, we ought to be encouraged by the progress that has been made in the last 30 years. There is ample evidence of good pastoral efforts having been made in introducing the Liturgy of the Hours in the life of the Church . . . Liturgy of the Hours is far more common in the prayer life of the lay Christian than it was prior to the Second Vatican Council" (page 16).

### Morning and Evening Prayers

In the Liturgy of the Hours, the morning and evening prayers, through the tradition of the Church, are considered the most important hours to be celebrated.<sup>28</sup> Their communal (or public) celebration is encouraged, especially in the case of those who live in community.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, individual members of the faithful unable to take part in a common celebration should also remember these two times of prayer.<sup>30</sup> While the majority of the men in Lewinski’s study prayed the Liturgy of the Hours alone, their sense of praying with the whole Church was especially meaningful to them.<sup>31</sup>

The morning prayer is intended to sanctify the morning – so that the mind and will may be consecrated to God (Ps 5:3).<sup>32</sup> When celebrated as the light of a new day arises, the morning prayer also recalls the resurrection of the Lord Jesus – “the true light that gives light to every man . . . the true light enlightening all people (Jn 1:9); and “the sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2), who is “the rising sun [who] will come to us from heaven” (Lk 1:78).<sup>33</sup> Not only is the morning sanctified, but the whole day, as attested to by one of the men in Lewinski’s study: “When I start my day with Morning Prayer I put God at the centre and I begin to see everything that follows in my day through that lens.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #37.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, #40.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Lewinski, “Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part II”, 11-12.

<sup>32</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #38.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Lewinski, “Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part I”, 5.

The evening prayer, when evening approaches and the day is far spent, is a time of giving thanks for the day past.<sup>35</sup> As prayer is offered up, redemption is also recalled – “may my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice” (Ps 141:2).<sup>36</sup> Continuing with the theme of sacrifice, also remembered can be the sacrifice of our Lord in which he offered himself to the Father at the end of the ages for the salvation of the whole world.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the evening prayer can help to fix one’s hope on the light that knows no setting – the coming of Christ who will bring the grace of eternal light.<sup>38</sup> One observation here is that the *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours* does not seem to address confession of the faults of the day as the purpose of the evening hour.<sup>39</sup>

### Use of the Psalms

In the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church, to a large degree, prays through the psalms that the Old Testament authors composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup> The psalms can help raise the mind to God, inspire devotion, evoke gratitude in times of favour, and bring consolation in times of trial.<sup>41</sup> Often the words of a psalm will help one to pray with fervour, whether in thanksgiving and praise of God or in prayer for help in the throes of suffering.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, believers sometimes experience difficulty in making this inspired poetry their own prayer.<sup>43</sup> Where this is the case, Christians can remember that the

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<sup>35</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #39.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 355. Taft refers to three references that support asking pardon for the sins of the day at the time of vespers: the apostle Paul (Eph 4:25-32), Basil (*Longer Rules* 37:4), and the collect that concludes evensong in the *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII, 37.

<sup>40</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #100.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, #105.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, #101.



Holy Spirit, under whose inspiration the psalms were written, is present by his grace to those who use the psalms with good will.<sup>44</sup> Secondly, the faithful may also need to improve their understanding of the Bible and the psalms in order to be familiar with how to truly pray through the psalms.<sup>45</sup>

It is important to understand that the psalms are essentially poems of praise<sup>46</sup> – not readings, or prose prayers.<sup>47</sup> While they can be recited as readings, the psalms have a musical quality that determines their correct style of delivery.<sup>48</sup> In Hebrew they are called *Tehillim* (“songs of praise”) and in Greek, *psalmoi* (“songs to be sung to the lyre”).<sup>49</sup> The purpose of a psalm is to move the heart of those singing it, listening to it, or accompanying it – even though it does present a text to the mind.<sup>50</sup> From the *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours*, one learns that two traditions have been upheld: treating the psalms as praise to God (our words to God), and regarding the psalms as the word of God directed to human beings (God’s word to us).<sup>51</sup> In sum, when singing the psalms, one also ought to meditate on them verse by verse, with the heart ready to respond in the way the Holy Spirit desires – since the one who inspired the psalmist will also be present to those who in faith and love are ready to receive his grace.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, #102.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Toni Craven, *The Book of Psalms* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 35-42. Craven states that the timelessness of the psalms is directly related to the *poetic nature of their language*. Further, he mentions that when the psalmists pour out their life experiences to God, they do so in *poetry, not prose*. To comprehend these prayers, as C. S. Lewis wrote, the Psalms *must be read as poems* – otherwise, we shall miss what is in them and think we see what is not.

<sup>47</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #103.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Bradshaw, “The Historical Foundations of the Liturgy of the Hours”, 29-30.

<sup>52</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #104.

These two strands in relation to the psalms – praise directed toward God *and* meditation on God’s word – need not be seen as contradictory, but rather a call to multi-task.<sup>53</sup>

Important to realize is that whatever the historical origin of a psalm, each psalm has its own meaning.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, though the psalms originated centuries ago, they express accurately the pain and hope, the unhappiness and trust of people of every age and nation, and sing above all of faith in God, of revelation, and of redemption.<sup>55</sup> The *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours* affirms that the psalmists are unafraid to stand with God, to ponder all their life experiences closely, to look unflinchingly at their lives, to surrender to God their good and bad times, and to reflect an attitude of trust that all life experiences are appropriate topics of conversation with God.<sup>56</sup>

Those who pray the psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours do so in the name of the entire Body of Christ – in other words, the cycle of psalms is public, in the name of the Church, even for those who may be reciting an hour alone.<sup>57</sup> This removes the problem of discrepancy between personal feelings and the sentiments a psalm is expressing (for example, when a person feels sad and the psalm is one of joy, or when a person feels happy and the psalm is one of mourning).<sup>58</sup> In praying the psalms in the name of the Church, believers will find the words of the apostle Paul applicable: “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Rom 12:15).<sup>59</sup> Experientially, Lewinski found that the men who prayed the wide range of emotions in the psalms became more

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<sup>53</sup> Bradshaw, “The Historical Foundations of the Liturgy of the Hours”, 30.

<sup>54</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #107.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Craven, *The Book of Psalms*, 35-42.

<sup>57</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #108.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

sensitive to the needs of others and their commitment to the social apostolate grew stronger.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, in praying the psalms in the name of the Church, believers should be aware of the Messianic sense of the psalms – which was the reason for the Church's introduction of the Psalter into its Liturgy of the Hours.<sup>61</sup> This Messianic sense was revealed in the New Testament and affirmed by Christ when he said to the apostles: “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Lk 24:44).<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, the Church Fathers saw the whole Psalter as a prophecy of Christ and the Church.<sup>63</sup> They heard in the singing of the psalms the voice of Christ crying out to the Father, or of the Father conversing with the Son.<sup>64</sup> Lewinski writes about praying the Hours as the prayer of Christ – and that when the Church prays, it is Christ who prays.<sup>65</sup>

#### Commentary on Other Aspects of the Divine Office

First, the *reading of sacred Scripture* has an important place in the Liturgy of the Hours and follows an ancient tradition.<sup>66</sup> This reading is the decision of the Church for the Bride of Christ in order to unfold in the course of a year the mystery of Christ from his incarnation and birth until his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of his return.<sup>67</sup> Prayer accompanies the reading of sacred Scripture so that the reading may have

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<sup>60</sup> Lewinski, “Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part II”, 11.

<sup>61</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #109.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Lewinski, “Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part II”, 12.

<sup>66</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #140.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

greater effect and that, in turn, prayer (especially the praying of the psalms) may become more fervent and devout because of the reading.<sup>68</sup> In sum, Lewinski notes that “the Liturgy of the Hours provides ample opportunities to contemplate the face of Christ through the liturgical year . . . [and] a daily refocusing on the mystery of Christ in a 12-month cycle that is invaluable for the Christian.”<sup>69</sup>

Second, the Liturgy of the Hours is inextricably *linked to the Eucharist* in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, the Liturgy of the Hours incorporates the thanksgiving and praise, the memorial of the mysteries of salvation, as well as the petitions and foretaste of heavenly glory present in the Eucharistic mystery.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, the Liturgy of the Hours prepares believers for the celebration of the Eucharist itself.<sup>71</sup> It inspires and deepens the dispositions needed for the celebration of the Eucharist: faith, hope, love, devotion, and the spirit of self-denial.<sup>72</sup> Pastorally speaking this is borne out in Lewinski’s observations. He states that if Sunday Mass is only form of prayer Catholics are praying, they will never achieve a level of full, conscious, and active participation in the Eucharist.<sup>73</sup> By contrast, he notes, that the Liturgy of the Hours is a rich source of spiritual formation, enabling the faithful to celebrate a more fruitful and meaningful Eucharist.<sup>74</sup>

Third, the Liturgy of the Hours *sanctifies God’s people*. In the Divine Office, God’s life-giving words in the psalms are sung in his presence; readings are drawn from sacred Scripture; and the intercessions, prayers, and hymns are inspired by Scripture.<sup>75</sup> As a result,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Lewinski, “Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part I”, 8.

<sup>70</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #12.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Lewinski, “Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part II”, 12.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #14.

those partaking in the Liturgy of the Hours have access to holiness through the word of God since it receives such great emphasis.<sup>76</sup> Sanctification occurs in the way that a dialogue is set up between God and the people, in which God speaks to his people, and his people respond to him by song and prayer.<sup>77</sup> In sum, as Taft writes, “the Liturgy of the Hours, then, is a *sanctification* of life by turning to God at the beginning and end of each its day to do what all liturgy always does – to celebrate and manifest in ritual moments what is and must be the constant stance of our every minute of the day: our unceasing priestly offering, in Christ, of self, to the praise and glory of the Father in thanks for his saving gift in Christ [emphasis mine].”<sup>78</sup>

Fourth, the Scriptures indicate that through the Liturgy of the Hours, *time is consecrated*.

Christ himself instructed the disciples to “always pray and not give up” (Lk 18:1).<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, the author of Hebrews wrote: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise” (Heb 13:15).<sup>80</sup> Within the Divine Office, the Church has been faithful in obeying these instructions,<sup>81</sup> and thereby it consecrates to God the whole cycle of day and night.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, in praying the Hours, one sanctifies the day. In this respect, Lewinski aptly writes that “we can be open to God’s presence at every moment of the day . . . [to] be open throughout the day to God’s abiding presence affects my relationship to everyone and everything I encounter throughout the day.”<sup>83</sup> To sum up, the Liturgy of the Hours meets a need to sanctify time and to reclaim a properly Christian sense of time.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 359-360.

<sup>79</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #10.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Lewinski, “Liturgy of the Hours in the Parish: Part I”, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Steven J. Lopes, “The Liturgy of the Hours”, *Homiletic & Pastoral Review* (April 2004), <http://www.canticanova.com/articles/liturgy/art9ab3.htm>

Fifth, in the Liturgy of the Hours, *God is praised with the Church in heaven*. Since the Church is in Christ, then in the Liturgy of the Hours the Church is performing the priestly office of its Head – for example, “through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise” (Heb 13:15).<sup>85</sup> This continual prayer is also the prayer that Christ himself, together with his Body, addresses to the Father.<sup>86</sup> In Ephesians, Paul writes that “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6).<sup>87</sup> And so in offering these praises to God, the Church is standing before God's throne.<sup>88</sup>

Sixth, the *priesthood of Christ* functions in the Liturgy of the Hours. Since Christ himself is present in the gathered community when the Liturgy of the Hours is celebrated, then he is also present in the prayer and song of the Church, and in the proclamation of God's word.<sup>89</sup> In the Holy Spirit then, Christ carries out through the Church the task of redeeming humanity and giving perfect glory to God.<sup>90</sup> In sum, from studying the *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, the intimate bond between the prayer of Christ and the prayer of the Liturgy soon becomes apparent.<sup>91</sup>

Seventh, in the Liturgy of the Hours, *the Church also makes petitions and intercessions for the world*. It expresses the prayers and desires of all the faithful, through Christ, to the Father for the salvation of the whole world.<sup>92</sup> Since the Church's prayers are offered in Christ's name (that is through the Lord Jesus Christ), its voice is not just its own, but also

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<sup>85</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #15.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible*, 2272.

<sup>88</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #15.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, #13.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Lopes, “The Liturgy of the Hours”, Internet.

<sup>92</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #17.

Christ's voice.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, the Church is continuing to offer the petitions and intercessions that Christ made in the days of his earthly life.<sup>94</sup> To sum up, in the words of Lopes:

“Understood as the prayer of the whole Church, the Hours allows the individual to enter into an intimacy with the whole community of disciples, expressing solidarity in concern for the needs of the Church and *the world* [emphasis mine].<sup>95</sup>

Finally, the sacred Scriptures, the writings of the saints, and the prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours help to create *a wellspring for the Christian life*.<sup>96</sup> In response to the Church's requests, it is the Lord (without whom one can do nothing: Jn 15:5), who then gives power and increase to what is done, so that the faithful may be built up each day in the Spirit into the temple of God (Eph 2:21-22), to the measure of Christ's fullness (Eph 4:13), and to receive greater strength to bring the good news of Christ to those outside.<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

From the analysis and thematic commentary in this paper, which highlight some of the rich theological and spiritual underpinnings of the Liturgy of the Hours, one may concur with Lopes' observation:

Whether one has been praying the Hours for many decades or is encountering it for the first time, understanding the internal logic of the prayer and its theological foundations can foster an appreciation of the power, beauty, and formative influence of the Church's Liturgy.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Lopes, “The Liturgy of the Hours”, Internet.

<sup>96</sup> *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, #18.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, alongside the celebration of the Eucharist, personal prayer, and a life of active discipleship, the Liturgy of the Hours constitutes an integral component of the spiritual life.<sup>98</sup>

In closing, the Liturgy of Hours has an “ancient beauty and modern relevance” when one comes to understand its nature as Trinitarian prayer, its nature of sanctifying God’s people and time, its nature as priestly prayer, and its nature as the prayer of the whole Church.<sup>99</sup>

## Appendix

Appendix A, entitled “The Liturgy of the Hours: The Seasons of the Day”, is offered as an additional personal reflection, and in a sense represents a personal commentary, on the meaning of the Divine Office as experienced by the author.

In presenting this Appendix, however, a caution is in order. This type of personal approach can move away from the *important and vital communal nature of the Liturgy of the Hours* (an overarching theme that emerges in this paper) and become mere personal piety.

Personal piety needs to be critically assessed based on the excellent principles given in the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines* (Vatican City, December 2001).

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<sup>98</sup> Lopes, “The Liturgy of the Hours”, Internet.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. Interestingly, Lopes also writes that “now more than ever, Catholics, both individually and in community, are turning to the wisdom of the Liturgy of the Hours as a support for their own spiritual growth and as a means of situating their own prayer experience within that of the larger Church.”



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Appendix A

**The Liturgy of the Hours: The Seasons of the Day**

The hours of the day, which parallel the Liturgy of the Hours, each differ in their impressions, feelings and moods, and therefore vary in the way we experience them. Like the seasons of a year, the different hours of the day may be likened to seasons of a day. Each hour we encounter has a character and a presence richer and more complex than clock time (where an hour is only a unit of time composed of 60 minutes). Here are reflections on the unique significance of the seasons of a day, which parallel the Liturgy of the Hours:

<b>A SACRED JOURNEY THROUGH THE HOURS OF THE DAY</b>			
<b>Angel</b>	<b>Overview</b>	<b>Reflections</b>	<b>Prayer and Commitment</b>
<b>Vigils</b>	<p>The Night Watch</p> <p>Before the day’s noises begin, when it is still perfectly quiet.</p>	<p>Vigils is the night-watch hour, the time for learning to trust the darkness. It is the hour that calls us to set aside time outside the practical demands of the day. We are invited to connect with the dark but grace-filled mystery in which we are immersed – the sacred, timeless dimension of our lives.</p> <p>We are challenged to carry the good news through the rest of the day: light shines in the midst of darkness. The very darkness shines!</p>	<p>In the stillness before my day begins, I open my heart to the gift of this hour. Gratefully I listen to the silence.</p>
<b>Lauds</b>	<p>The Coming of the Light</p> <p>A time to nourish one’s soul for this coming day.</p>	<p>This hour takes us out of the darkness into the light.</p> <p>We can begin with the attitude that this day is a gift. In fact, everything in our life is a gift. This allows us to see that the appropriate response to this given world is gratefulness, even in the midst of suffering, even in the midst of pain.</p> <p>We are challenged to ask: “What attitude should I bring to this day?”</p>	<p>As this hour opens the door to a new day, I rise to give thanks for new opportunities.</p>
<b>Terce</b>	<p>The Joy of Living</p> <p>A mid-morning prayer break.</p>	<p>Mid-morning is an upbeat time. The focus of this hour is on the Spirit – that life-breath, that joy of living within us. This is the time of day to stop for a few moments and open ourselves to the force of love that drives the universe. There is a delight in being blessed with life.</p> <p>We are challenged to pass on this blessing to others by a good word or smile, by a kind action that goes completely unobserved, or simply by a good wish in silence.</p>	<p>At this mid-morning hour, grateful for the gift of life, I take a deep breath. May all beings everywhere live in peace.</p>

<b>Sext</b>	<p>Commitment and Fervor</p> <p>A meditation during lunch-hour.</p>	<p>Stopping at midday for a moment of reflection is a spontaneous gesture of the human heart. All over the world people pray for peace at this hour.</p> <p>However, we also tend to get sleepy at noon. This is a time when our good intentions and our enthusiasm can begin to flag.</p> <p>We are challenged and roused to make a courageous resolution: “I will stay true to myself and uphold my ideals for the rest of the day.”</p>	<p>At this hour of high noon, I lift up heart and mind in a moment of grateful silence.</p>
<b>None</b>	<p>The Shadows Lengthen</p> <p>The needed boost for the last hours of the work day.</p>	<p>This period of the day reminds us that it is time to turn inward again, after the outward movement of the day and all its activities. When the things we might have relied on in the course of the day are seen to be transitory, we need to look to those things which endure.</p> <p>We are challenged to listen intently to the music that never stops – the inner music, the music of silence.</p>	<p>At this hour, as day declines towards evening, may I be renewed in spirit and not grow tired of giving my best.</p>
<b>Vespers</b>	<p>Lighting the Lamps</p> <p>An evening celebration.</p>	<p>This is the hour for us to stop and find peace of heart through reconciling contradictions within us and around us. As we put the disappointments and regrets of the day behind us, we become festive in a new way.</p> <p>We are challenged this hour by being called to neighbourliness and celebration. It invites us to light the lamp of caring attention for our neighbours in this dark world.</p>	<p>At this evening hour, I pause to review the harvest of today, and to give thanks from my heart for what I have learned for tomorrow.</p>
<b>Compline</b>	<p>Completing the Circle</p> <p>At night, just before going to bed.</p>	<p>This is the hour that completes the circle of the day – it is a time of completion. It represents the peaceful transition into the silence of sleep.</p> <p>Briefly we review our day and resolve to do better tomorrow.</p> <p>We are challenged to then approach the night with trust and joyful anticipation, as though it were a deep ocean from which we can fish up all sorts of wonderful things. Trust opens our hearts to the blessing of rest and the promise of helpful dreams.</p>	<p>At this hour of rest for the night, I give thanks for another day. I send blessings to all who cannot sleep and open my heart for the gift of dreams.</p>

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<http://www.gratefulness.org/angels/newVisitors.cfm?l=ENG> Note: This website is dedicated to providing education and support for the practice of grateful living as a global ethic, based on the teachings of Br. David Steindl-Rast and colleagues.

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