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Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours spreads the riches of the eucharistic mystery over the various hours of the day and at the same time it prepares for the celebration of this mystery. It is the voice of the church praising her Lord and with him offering the spiritual worship of the whole mystical body to the Father.

Insofar as we can, we share this prayer of the church, both in a communal and personal way, giving particular importance to Morning and Evening Prayer (Lauds and Vespers).

Rule of Life for Associates (ROLA), 9

**Associates of the
Blessed Sacrament
Initial Formation Program**

Liturgy of the Hours

1. Opening Prayer

Morning or Evening Prayer of the Day (First part up through the second Psalm)

2. Introduction to the Theme

From ancient times, the church has had the custom of celebrating each day the liturgy of the hours. In this way, the church fulfills the Lord's precept to pray without ceasing, at once offering its praise to God the Father and interceding for the salvation of the world.

The Second Vatican Council showed the importance of the traditional discipline of the church and desired to renew that discipline. It was, therefore, very concerned to bring about a suitable restoration of this liturgy of prayer so that priests and other members of the church in today's circumstances might celebrate it better and more effectively (cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 84).

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read the disciples gathered at the third hour (3:1); elsewhere, at noontime (10: 9); and, even at midnight (16: 25). In time, the church established a set discipline for this Liturgy of the Hours or the Divine Office, to be principally a prayer of praise and petition, using antiphons, psalms and canticles, a reading of Sacred Scripture, moments of silence, and time for intercessions.

The Liturgy of the Hours, like other liturgical actions, is not something private but belongs to the whole body of the church. When the laity are invited to the Liturgy of the Hours and come together in unity of heart and voice, they show forth the church in its celebration of the mystery of Christ.

3. Eymard . . . *In His Own Words*

“The office recited before the Blessed Sacrament is a communal adoration, the official prayer of the entire Congregation. In our recitation of the office we all become adorers, not by right nor by rule, neither by the quality of our prayer, rather our prayer is changed into the prayer of the church itself.”

Saint Peter Julian Eymard, [text III, 278]

4. Bible Text

“In those days he departed to the mountains to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named apostles.”

Luke 6:12-13, NAB



5. Conversation – tell us your story

- Please share your experience of praying in the morning and/or evening. What does it contribute to your spirituality?
- Thomas Merton called the psalms “the most significant and influential collection of religious poems ever written.” (*Bread in the Wilderness*, 1953) They have been the substance of daily worship in Jewish and Christian practices, the source of private devotion and reflection for people the world over. Share your experience of reading and praying the psalms.

6. Teaching – drawing on the following reading

- *Emmanuel* article by Jim Brown

Liturgy of the Hours – Key Points

- Over the last 20 years, the Blessed Sacrament religious have invited the parishioners of their parishes to join them for morning and (in some places) evening prayer. As the *ROLA* states: “The Liturgy of the Hours spreads the riches of the eucharistic mystery over the various hours of the day and at the same time it prepares for the celebration of this mystery.” (9)
- As a faithful Jew, Jesus surely entered into the prayer customs of devout Israelites, taking part in public prayers, going to the synagogue and when in Jerusalem, to the temple, which Jesus called the house of prayer. Jesus’ main prayer book was the psalms, his *Liturgy of the Hours*, if you will. Praying the *Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours*, either morning and/or evening prayer, we pray two psalms at each hour, where we find all or some part of 125 of the 150 psalms.
- The psalms speak of the relationship of the ancient Israelites with their God. They express the *real* feelings of joyful praise and thanksgiving, songs of distress or *lament*, and even the honest expressions of anger and upset. The psalms give expression to a whole range of emotional realities – wonder, exultation, anguish and joy – written by poets who Thomas Merton reminds us “knew who God was.”

Reading

Praying the Psalms by Jim Brown

If you are like me, you often find yourself mouthing some unconscious, unreflective utterance invoking the name of God. Your teenager arrives safely at some destination. Before you can send a “Great!” text back, you have silently whispered, “Thank you, God.” The doctor has informed you that your parent has incurable cancer and has two months to live. As you walk back to his room you close your eyes and find yourself muttering, “God help us! How am I going to tell mom, my siblings?” Or if you are a sinner like me and you read in the newspaper about some tyrannical despot massacring thousands of innocent men, women and children you inwardly explode, “God ____ him!” and then maybe catch yourself, “How Christian is that?”

Well, for some 700 years, ancient Israelites didn’t hesitate to cry out their real feelings at God. In fact, many of their utterances were written down and later included in the canon of the Old Testament. Try these examples:

- For all things small or large, the psalmist sang: “*Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures forever*” (Ps 118); or “*I thank you, Lord, with all my heart, you heard the words of my mouth*” (Ps 138).
- There are many psalms that express the kind of distress alluded to above: “*With all my voice I cry to the Lord, with all my voice I entreat the Lord. I pour out my troubles before (you); I tell (you) all my distress.*” Psalm 142 says it about as good as any psalm.
- And those feelings of revenge or hatred that slip in from time to time, how about: “*May God rain burning coals upon them, cast them into the grave never more to rise*” (Ps 140); Or this stunner: “*Fair Babylon, you destroyer, happy those who pay you back the evil you have done us! Happy those who seize your children and smash them against the rock*” (Ps 137).

What!?! “Smash them against the rock?” Well, the first time I read that line I was shocked. The word of God? A passage from the Bible? At the time I did not understand nor appreciate the Israelite mindset; and the fact that such a psalm was written long before the Sermon on the Mount. Absent Jesus’ challenge to “turn the other cheek,” or “love thy enemies,” the psalmists had a basic “black and white” worldview, especially when it came to their “enemies” or evil men who opposed God’s law.

And so we read in many of the psalms the raw sentiments of hate, revenge, and a prayer that (they) “be put to shame and disgrace” (Ps 35:4); that “death take them by surprise; let them go down *alive* to Sheol” (Ps 55:16); or this juicy curse for unjust rulers (the subject of my anger above): “O God, smash the teeth in their mouths; break the jaw-teeth of these lions, Lord! Make them vanish like water flowing away; trodden down, let them wither like grass. Let them dissolve like a snail that oozes away, like an untimely birth that never sees the sun” (Ps 58:7–9). Whew! Those psalmists said it like they felt it.

I gradually came to appreciate the brutal honesty expressed in so many of the psalms as my own spirituality evolved, formed by the likes of the peripatetic Malcom Boyd and his *Are You Running With Me, Jesus?*; the *Secular City* by Harvey Cox; *Confessions of an Innocent Bystander* and others by Thomas Merton. And somewhere during those days a retreat master encouraged us to “speak what was in our heart to the Lord.” He stressed honesty; that God, the one “who knit me in my mother’s womb” (Ps 139:13b) was big enough to take anything from a young man, struggling with doubt, disappointments, fallen heroes, etc. trying to grow into an adult spirituality. That wise and holy priest was like the psalmists who wrote 150 poems which, in the words of Merton (*Praying the Psalms*), “are the songs of men who knew who God was” (7).

Ah, relationships! Isn’t it really all about relationships? When we read the Psalms, in the words of Etienne Charpentier (*How to Read the Old Testament*), “we are reading the language of relationships.” These ancient poets both teach us important truths about God and more importantly share their faith experiences of the almighty Creator *and* the one who dwells among us with tenderness and compassion.

A man who comes to mind with that unique Jewish approach to conversing with God is one of my favorite characters, Tevye, in *Fiddler on the Roof*. He talks to God in honesty and faithfulness. Only a man in a unique relationship with God could utter this classic line from the musical: “I know. I know. We are your chosen people. But, once in a while can’t you choose someone else?” Sounds like a line inspired by Psalm 10 or Psalm 77:

*Lord, why do you stand afar off
and hide yourself in times of distress?*

*The poor man is devoured by the pride of the wicked:
he is caught in the schemes that others have made. Ps 10:1.*

*At night I mused within my heart.
I pondered and my spirit questioned.*

*Will the Lord reject us forever?
Will he show us his favor no more?
Has his love vanished forever?
Has his promise come to an end?
Does God forget his mercy
or in anger withhold his compassion?*

*I said: "This is what causes my grief;
that the way of the Most High has changed" Ps 77:7–11.*

And then there was *the* relationship: that between Jesus and his *Abba*. As a good Jew, Jesus' main prayer book was the *psalms*, his *Liturgy of the Hours*, if you will. I imagine this very human Jesus, so attuned to all the wonders of his Father's creation and his presence during difficult times, singing those various *songs of praise* or *thanksgiving* (Examples: Psalms 8, 9, 18, 22: 23 – 32, 31, 33, 34, 40, 67, 92, 96, 103, 104, 118, 136 and 138 (quoted below):

*I thank you Lord, with all my heart, (1a)
When I cried out, you answered; (3)
You guard my life when my enemies rage. (7b)
The Lord is with me to the end.
Lord, your love endures forever. (8a, b)*

I also imagine this very human Jesus being so aware and sensitive to the evils and sin in the world, the many human foibles, the injustices, lies and deceits, all the sad ironies and hypocrisies that make up the human condition. Comforting and reassuring would have been the many *laments* found among the 150 psalms - nearly one-third. These were the cries to a caring God in times of distress, anguish, loss of confidence, petitioning God to relieve a particular situation. (Examples: Psalms 3 – 7, 13, 10 – 12, 14, 22, 25 – 28, 35, 36, 38 – 40, 51 – 59, 61 – 64, 140 – 143).

One can imagine Jesus singing out Psalm 143 at various points throughout his life seeking God's will for him. Don't we often hope that God will help us find a life that is "level and smooth?"

*Lord, listen to my prayer;
Turn your ear to my appeal. (1)*

*I muse on what your hand has wrought
And to you I stretch out my hands.
Like a parched land my soul thirsts for you. (5–6)*

*In the morning let me know your love
For I put my trust in you.
Make me know the way I should walk:
To you I lift up my soul.*

*For you, O Lord, are my God.
Let your good spirit guide me
In ways that are level and smooth. (8–10)*

Four times the first eleven verses of this psalm appear in the *Christian Prayer* book, including Evening Prayer for Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

In addition to these two main types of psalms, Scripture scholars tell us there are *wisdom* psalms, named such because they are more like teachings, similar to the *Wisdom Books* (Job, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs). Examples would be: 37, 112, 128. There are also *royal* songs that address matters concerning the king, for example 2, 20, 45, 144. There are *Zion* psalms with a focus on Jerusalem, such as 46, 87, 132. There are a few about *divine kingship*; Psalms 47, 93, 95 – 99 would be good examples. Lastly, we have liturgical psalms, designed to be used in public worship situations; good examples would be 15, 24, 107, 122.

It is at Mass that most of us encounter the psalms, though only select verses are used. If we have prayed the *Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours*, either morning and/or evening prayer, we pray two psalms at each hour, where we find all or some part of 125 of the 150 psalms.

Scripture scholars tell us that most of the psalms were prayed at worship services in ancient Israel, in the Temple at Jerusalem, and most assuredly wherever prayer was ritualized, including all the feasts and festivals. As the psalms are part of both Jewish and Christian prayer and worship, so it is likely that the ancient Israelites used the psalms for both individual meditation and prayer as well as public worship.

I suspect that each of us Christians has a favorite psalm. For many it is the comforting Psalm 23: *The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.* Or Psalm 27: *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom do I fear?* Psalm 42 – like most of the psalms – is so full of imagery: *As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God.* And the jubilant Psalm 92:

*It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
to sing praise to your name, Most High,
to proclaim your love in the morning,
your faithfulness in the night,
with the ten stringed harp,
with melody upon the lyre.*

There is that hymn of thanksgiving, Psalm 118, that everyone would recognize;

*Give thanks to the Lord, who is good,
whose love endures forever.*

My favorite is Psalm 51, said at Morning Prayer every Friday. It has it all: the wide range of emotions we can feel depending on the day and what's going on in our life.

*Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.
In your compassion blot out my offense.
O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin.*

O God, whom Jesus told us to call “Abba,”
forgive me the stupid and hurtful things I’ve done.
Make things right again – between me and _____,
between you and me.

*Indeed you love truth in the heart;
then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom.*

Lord, I try to be straightforward and do
an honest day's work.

Give me Solomon's wisdom
with these complex challenges I face.

*Make me hear rejoicing and gladness,
that the bones you have crushed may revive.*

May I feel again the joy and happiness
that comes from getting on the other side
of facing my challenges.

*A pure heart create for me, O God,
put a steadfast spirit within me.*

May my motives be pure O Lord.

May I have the energy and stick-to-it-ness to be:
a good husband, father, friend, citizen, consultant.

*Give me again the joy of your help;
with a spirit of fervor sustain me.*

Lord, show me signs that you're backing me up,
especially when I falter or feel

I cannot do it all alone.

As we said above, it's all about relationships, the psalms speak to relationship. The images used by these ancient poets reflect in the words of Hauer and Young, (*An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey into Three Worlds*) "a basic view of life that we might call the *relational world* of the psalms: God and me, God and other divine beings, God and Israel, and God and nature."

In closing, let me reference again that iconic Jewish parable, the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. At the wedding of their daughter Tzeitel to the tailor Motel, Tevye and his wife Golde sing:

Sunrise, sunset. Sunrise, sunset.

Swiftly fly the years.

One season following the other

Laden with happiness and tears.

The song speaks to what anyone who has been married a long time knows, the wonderful and difficult journey of a good marriage. I believe it also speaks to the relationship many of us have with our God – at least if we’re honest. The psalms give expression to the range of emotional realities expressed in these lyrics, songs of wonder, exultation, anguish, disappointment and joy written by poets who - Merton reminds us – “knew who God was.”

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Give
Thanks
to the Lord
for He is
Good:
His Love endures forever
Psalm 106:1

7. Closing Prayer

Continuation of the Liturgy of the Hours begun at the beginning of the Session starting with the Scripture Reading through the *Concluding Prayer*.

8. Additional Reading Material

- *Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours*. “General Instructions of the Liturgy of the Hours” (Abridged), Pages 8–19. Online: http://www.ehow.com/how_2057577_pray-liturgy-hours.html
- Merton, Thomas. *Praying the Psalms*, The Liturgical Press, 1955

Prayer in Honor of Saint Peter
Julian Eymard

Gracious God of our ancestors, you led Peter Julian Eymard, like Jacob in times past, on a journey of faith. Under the guidance of your gentle Spirit, Peter Julian discovered the gift of love in the Eucharist which your son Jesus offered for the hungers of humanity. Grant that we may celebrate this mystery worthily, adore it profoundly, and proclaim it prophetically for your greater glory. Amen.

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