

LESSON 47: LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 9	:	Cover points 1 to 6
For Intermediate Level / Age 12	:	Cover points 1 to 8
For Advanced Level / Age 15	:	Cover points 1 to 9

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we learned about the most important prayer for a Christian, that is, the Lord's Prayer, which is also commonly known as the Our Father. In this lesson, we will learn about another very important prayer, which is known as the Liturgy of the Hours. It is also an official prayer of the Church.

Current lesson:

1. It is common to see priests, deacons, or religious stop during the day to offer prayers out of a small black book. Sometimes even lay people will have that same black book and sit in the back pew of church to pray. Priests, deacons, and religious are obligated to pray daily what is called the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office. It consists of praying a set of prayers each day at different times, from morning to night. It is a prayer routine not only reserved for those consecrated to God, but also a common prayer practice for the laity.
2. Historically, Jews prayed at fixed intervals throughout the day. The Jewish people began a tradition of praying three times a day: morning, afternoon, and evening. This developed into a program of praying the psalms in particular as they expressed the many desires of the human heart.
3. Since most of the early Christians were converts from Judaism, they continued the Jewish tradition of praying the psalms. This type of prayer was maintained as the Church grew. Father Timothy Gallagher notes in his book *Praying the Liturgy of the Hours*, "Throughout the Church, in Palestine, Antioch, Constantinople and Africa, Christians gathered in their churches twice each day to pray the psalms. Daily they assembled for 'morning and evening hymns'."
4. Later on this tradition was expanded in monasteries to praying the psalms seven or eight times a day, striving to live out the words of Saint Paul to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This tradition looks like this:

Matins (during the night, often at midnight); also called Vigils or Nocturns (Night Office)

Lauds or "Morning Prayer" (at Dawn, or 3 a.m.)

Prime or "Early Morning Prayer" (First Hour, around 6 a.m.)

Terce or "Mid-Morning Prayer" (Third Hour, around 9 a.m.)

Sext or "Midday Prayer" (Sixth Hour, around noon)

None or "Mid-Afternoon Prayer" (Ninth Hour, around 3 p.m.)



Vespers or “Evening Prayer” (around 6 p.m.)

Compline or “Night Prayer” (before going to bed, typically at 8 p.m. or 9 p.m.)

The Church spread out the 150 Psalms over the course of these hours and eventually created a cycle of prayer. Currently it consists of a four-week Psalter where all the Psalms are prayed throughout a period of four weeks (if all of the “hours” of prayer are observed).

5. Contemplative monasteries (for example, the Discalced Carmelites) keep to this rhythm of prayer, while priests and other active religious tend to pray only the Lauds and Vespers. The time of day is less an issue for those in the world than it is for men and women of the cloister, who abide by a sacred rhythm of prayer and work.
6. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has continued to promote this practice and has encouraged the laity to join in this Liturgy.

Sacrosanctum Concilium, 100: “Pastors of souls should see to it that the chief hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and the more solemn feasts. And the laity, too, are encouraged to recite the divine office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually.”

7. The foundation of the prayer is simple, praying the Psalms, but in practicality can be quite difficult. If one chooses to purchase a physical breviary (the book that contains the Liturgy of the Hours) it can be challenging especially if no one is there to show you what to do.

Increasingly, clergy and religious (as well as laity) are using mobile applications on their mobile telephones as well as tablets to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Less of them are using the physical breviary these days.

8. The basic structure of the Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer is such:
 - opening versicle (or the invitatory for morning prayer);
 - a hymn;
 - two psalms, or parts of psalms with a scriptural canticle. At Morning Prayer, this consists of a psalm of praise, a canticle from the Old Testament, followed by another psalm. At Evening Prayer this consists of two psalms, or one psalm divided into two parts, and a scriptural canticle taken from the New Testament;
 - a short passage from scripture;
 - a responsory, typically a verse of scripture, but sometimes liturgical poetry;
 - a canticle taken from the Gospel of Luke: the Canticle of Zechariah (*Benedictus*) for morning prayer, and the Canticle of Mary (*Magnificat*) for evening prayer;
 - intercessions, composed by the Church;
 - the Lord’s Prayer;
 - the concluding prayer, composed by the Church;
 - a blessing given by the priest or deacon leading Morning or Evening Prayer, or in the absence of clergy and in individual recitation, a short concluding versicle.
9. Pray the Liturgy of the Hours with the students. You may use a mobile app if necessary.



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