



# LITURGY

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## OF THE HOURS

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DIOCESAN LITURGICAL COMMISSION  
CHRISTCHURCH

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To:

Priests and Pastoral Assistants

Parish Liturgy Committees

Directors of Religious Studies

PPRE Teachers

# THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

The Liturgy of the Hours refers to the practice of communities and individuals offering official public prayer at regular points through the day and night. This liturgy goes back to Christianity's early beginnings and before that, to Jewish prayer practices.

The mystery of Christ, His Incarnation and Passover, which we celebrate in the Eucharist, especially at the Sunday assembly, permeates and transfigures the time of each day, through the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, the "Divine Office".<sup>1</sup> As the dismissal reminds us that our liturgical experience must extend throughout the week, so the Liturgy of the Hours can be understood as an extension of our worship throughout the hours of every day.<sup>2</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that the Liturgy of the Hours is "like an extension of the Eucharistic celebration"<sup>3</sup> These Hours keep us aware of God throughout the day and offer praises to God at various times throughout the day.

The structure of the Liturgy of the Hours is a little different from the liturgy of the various sacraments. It does not have a central ritual action like the meal of the Eucharist or the water bath of baptism. The purpose is not to celebrate one particular moment or action, but to consecrate the unfolding hours of each day to God. The shape of the Liturgy of the

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<sup>1</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium ch.IV, 83-101,( CCC 1174).

<sup>2</sup> Mick, Lawrence, E (2009) *How we Worship: the Eucharist the Sacraments and the Hours* pg. 129 Ligouri Missouri

<sup>3</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 1178

Hours is complex, partly because it derives from two different historical bases. These have been commonly called the ***Cathedral Office*** and the ***Monastic Office***.

The Cathedral Office consisted primarily of two prayer services, one at dawn and one at sunset. These morning and evening prayers were intended for the whole people of God inviting them all to gather for prayer at the start and end of the day. The design of these prayer services was geared toward the larger community of the faithful. They included ritual actions and often used the same psalms and canticles each day so that people learned to sing them easily.

The Cathedral Office also came to be called the Canonical Office because it was maintained at the cathedral in each city by a group of ministers called canons. They made sure that the prayer was offered, even when the faithful did not come together to pray. When any of the canons was travelling, he was bound to pray the office at the same time as his confreres at the cathedral. From this developed the requirement that the clergy recited the office daily, whether in common or alone. This office was modelled largely on the Monastic Office.

The Monastic Office developed in monasteries where the monks met many times during the day and night for prayer. In addition to Morning and Evening Prayer, the Monastic Office included prayer at the third, sixth and ninth hours of the day, night prayer called Compline, and prayer at midnight. It had been customary for all Christians to pray privately or in groups at all of those times except midnight. The monks developed that custom into communal liturgical prayer throughout the day.

# THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS AS THE CHURCH'S SOURCE OF PRAYER

The word “liturgy” originally meant a “public work” or a “service in the name of and on behalf of the people.” In Christian Tradition it means the participation of the People of God in “Opus Dei”, the “work of God”.<sup>4</sup> Through the liturgy, Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with and through his Church.

In the New Testament the word “liturgy” refers not only to the celebration of divine worship but also to the proclamation of the Gospel and to active charity.<sup>5</sup> In a liturgical celebration the Church is a servant of the image of her Lord, the one “Leitourgos” (minister);<sup>6</sup> She shares in Christ’s priesthood (worship), which is both prophetic (proclamation) and kingly (service of charity). From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. John 17:4

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Luke 1:23; Acts 13:2; Rom. 15:16, 27; 2Cor.9:12; Phil2:14-17, 25, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Heb. 8:2,6.

<sup>7</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium 7#2-3

## THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

This Council called for reform of the Divine Office with special emphasis on Morning and Evening Prayer as the “hinge on which the daily office turns.”<sup>8</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours is intended to become the prayer of the whole People of God. In it Christ Himself “continues his priestly work through His Church”<sup>9</sup> His members participate according to their own place in the Church and the circumstances of their lives: priests devoted to the pastoral ministry, because they are called to remain diligent in prayer and the service of the word; religious by the charism of their consecrated lives; all the faithful as much as possible.<sup>10</sup>

The Council encouraged parish priests to see to it that “these hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in churches on Sundays and on more solemn feasts.”<sup>11</sup> This reformed office issued after the Council, retains much of its character as a monastic discipline and is eminently suited for use in parishes.

In fact many parishes have reintroduced Morning and Evening Prayer as part of parish life. Sometimes Morning Prayer is celebrated instead of a weekday Mass, when a priest is not available for Mass. Evening Prayer is sometimes prayed before parish meetings or for the parish at large during Advent and Lent.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> SC 100

<sup>9</sup> SC 83

<sup>10</sup> SC 100; cf. 86,96,98,PO 5

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Mick, Lawrence, E (2009) *How we Worship: the Eucharist, The Sacraments and the Hours*. Ligouri, Missouri

# STRUCTURE OF THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Both Morning and Evening Prayer have a similar structure, consisting of a hymn, psalms, a reading, a canticle and intercessory prayer. The hymns and psalms are chosen to reflect the time of day. The focus of each liturgy would reflect the feast or season being celebrated.

**Morning Prayer** has the character of a dedication of the day to God. This “opening of the lips” sees the dawn of a new day as a symbol of resurrection and new life, as well as looking toward the dawn of eternity. A theme of praise of God marks the office, which traditionally used the laudate psalms (Psalms 148-150) as a central element. Another often used was Psalm 63, “O God, you are my God, for you I long...” A reading from Scripture is followed by the **Benedictus**, the canticle Zechariah sang at the birth of John the Baptist. Then intercessions with a focus on the needs of the coming day are offered and concluded with the Lord’s Prayer. A Collect prayer and dismissal bring Morning Prayer to a close.

**Evening Prayer** has two traditional themes: thanksgiving for the gifts of the day and repentance for sins committed. Evening Prayer is similar in structure to Morning Prayer, though it may begin with a ritual lighting of lamps or candles called the Lucernarium.<sup>13</sup> This practical action took on symbolic significance and became rather standard in the Cathedral Office. The hymn often spoke of evening, and Psalm 141 was often used because it speaks of an evening

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<sup>13</sup> Mick, Lawrence, E (2009) *How we Worship: the Eucharist, The Sacraments and the Hours*. Ligouri, Missouri pg.132

sacrifice; “Let my prayer become as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” This verse also led to using incense with this psalm, though the Roman tradition used incense with the canticle of Mary (*Magnificat*) that comes after the reading. Like Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer concludes with intercession, the Lord’s Prayer, a collect and dismissal.<sup>14</sup>

The celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours demands not only harmonizing the voice with the praying heart, but also a deeper understanding of the liturgy and of the Bible, especially of the Psalms.<sup>15</sup> Moreover the reading of the Word of God at each Hour and a reading from spiritual masters at certain Hours, reveals more deeply the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, assist in understanding the psalms and prepare for silent prayer. The *Lectio Divina*, where the Word of God is read and meditated, becomes prayer rooted in the liturgical celebration.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus taught us to “pray always” (Luke 18:1), and the Liturgy of the Hours is a way that the Church fulfills that command. Those who share in this official prayer of the Church join themselves with the whole Church around the world. This prayer is the prayer of Christ Himself, for we always pray as members of Christ’s Body, we offer our prayer in and through Christ.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium 90

<sup>16</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 1177

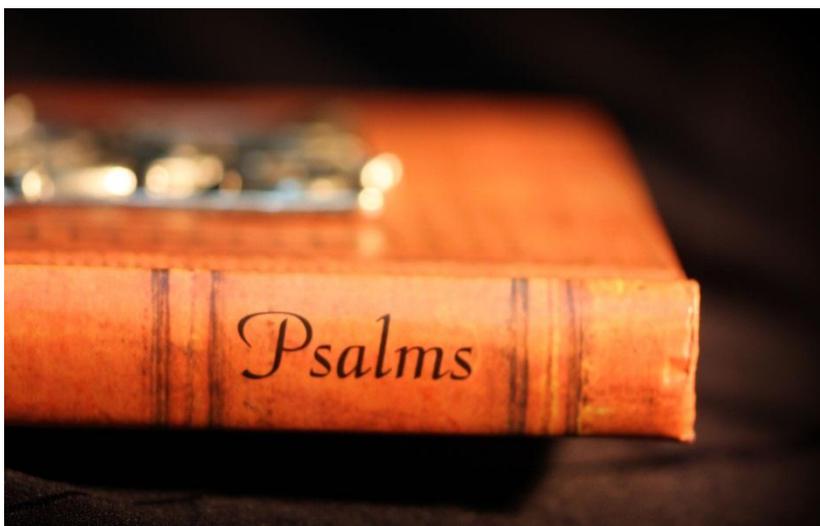
# USE OF THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS IN THIS DIOCESE

In the Cathedral Church of this diocese there has been a tradition of using the Liturgy of the Hours in a variety of ways:

- as part of a Holy Hour for the Feast of the Assumption, a Holy day of obligation in New Zealand.
- on the Feast of the Sacred Heart
- on Sundays during Lent and Advent
- at Ecumenical services
- at a “Month’s Mind” as part of the Office of the Dead
- as part of priests’ meetings on clergy days
- on pilgrimages

A number of parishes in our diocese pray the Liturgy of the Hours every morning, while in other parishes it has been used as part of a Holy Hour of adoration, or as part of a weekend retreat.

The diocese also has a subscription to the **ebreviary**, which enables the Liturgy of the Hours for any day of the year to be downloaded in pamphlet form. The only stipulation is that it be printed in Cathedral House. Parishes are free to contact Cathedral House if copies are needed.



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