

Oh Lord, open our lips,
and we shall declare your praise

Contemplative Prayer,
the Liturgy of the Hours
and the Ministry of Prayer

by

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elying on the General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours and other liturgical documents, I wish to offer some reflections on the Liturgy of the Hours as intercession^[1] What is happening in the Liturgy of the Hours? How do the psalms fit into this happening? Then I would like to offer some suggestions to help when praying the psalms.

“Pray for me”. “We are praying for you”. These expressions are familiar. What do they mean? What is intercession? What benefit is our prayer for others in their need or thanksgiving? What good is it to pray for someone who will not pray? To pray for someone else in his need must mean more than informing God unnecessarily about a situation and imploring a particular preferred outcome. Intercessory prayer must be more than an attempt to compel or lobby God with insistent petition.

Petition joins my prayer with yours. It is an expression of a unity of intention, a kind of communion with you. It says, “I am with you in your prayer. You are not alone”. In our intercession we do more than pray for others. We pray with them. An understanding of our mysterious ability to pray with other persons is fundamental for our appreciation of Intercession. Intercession means more than asking God for something. It is a communion of persons which finds a unique expression in the Liturgy of the Hours.

May our prayer rise before You like incense...^[2]

ll prayer is good. It comes from the initiative of God with a varying mixture of our own motives. What is good in our prayer is prompted by His grace. By it, God draws people to Himself. The Godward motion of petition of any person is also the result of grace. However, in so far as my petition is moved by fear (worry^[3]) and self-interest, it is like the “prayer of the gentiles”^[4] It might not be prayer at all, if it puts God to the test^[5](cf Exodus 16:7; Psalm 78; 1-6:32; Judith 8:11-17). Such “prayer” may refuse to believe unless God gives or does what it desires. It is to ‘pray’ wrongly.^[6] It is the prayer of religiosity, subject to the temptation to venerate God in order to obtain a secure life. By ‘using many words’ the gentiles believe they can persuade God to do their bidding.

However, the prayer of faith does not exclude petition^[7]. More free from worry and pre-occupation with self, believing in the utter faithfulness of God, its petition no longer seeks its own will, but the Father’s. Believing in the faithfulness of God, the prayer of faith is confident and trusting. It no longer insists upon its own ends. Jesus does not contradict Himself, saying *Pray without ceasing and search, ask and knock* on the one hand; and on the other *Do not pray as the gentiles do, using many words*, etc. The key element is not the quantity of words or time spent. Rather, one is the confident, open, listening prayer of faith. The other is the fearful, bargaining posture of religiosity.

Elsewhere Jesus says: Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.^[8] Never the less, petition has a natural place in the prayer of faith.^[9] By prayer of faith I mean Trinitarian prayer or prayer in Jesus. This can be described in other ways. Essentially, it is that prayer united with Jesus by the initiative of the Father^[10]by the working of the Holy Spirit. Here, petition is part of the process of self-abandonment to the Father’s plan of Love. It seeks to know this “plan” and embrace it, seeking light and freedom. Thus the prayer of faith is marked by its inclination towards gratitude, humility, poverty of spirit and purity of heart^[11].

In its interior solitude, the heart^[12] recognises the prayer of faith as His gift, His action, His prayer. The desire to pray for others also originates with Him; so do the requests others make to us for the accompaniment of our prayer. Prayer becomes a communion of persons - the Holy Trinity and oneself with all humanity. That communion of persons is also the image and likeness of God in which all people share at least by desire. The mature prayer of faith is intercessory by nature. In intercession this image and likeness of God achieves a focus

and is somehow realised through the part intercession plays in Christ's mission for the redemption of humanity. Thus this kind of prayer promotes a universal charity. It transcends time and place. It experiences an intimacy with all persons on earth and in heaven. The "power" or influence of this intercession becomes clearer. Thus interior solitude, the "place" of the heart and its prayer, is an entry point to an awareness of solidarity with all humanity. In other words, mere petition becomes intercession.

We can illustrate this with a story from the life of St. Francis^[13]:

Another time it happened that the abbot of the monastery of St. Justin, in the diocese of Perugia, met Francis. The abbot got down quickly from his horse, exchanged a few words with St. Francis about the welfare of his soul, and then, as he was leaving, he humbly asked St. Francis to pray for him. St. Francis answered him: "I will willingly pray, my Lord." When the abbot had gone a little way from St. Francis, the saint said to his companion: "Wait a bit, Brother, because I want to discharge the debt I incurred by my promise". For it was always his custom that, when he had been asked for prayers, he would not postpone the matter, but would quickly fulfil a promise of this kind. Therefore, while the saint was praying to God, the abbot suddenly felt in his soul an unusual warmth and sweetness, such as he had never experienced before in his soul, so much so that he seemed to be completely carried out of himself in ecstasy. He paused for a moment and when he came to himself, he recognised the power of St. Francis' prayer. Thereafter he always burned with greater love for the order and related the happening to many as a miracle. It is becoming that servants of God bestow upon one another little gifts like this; and it is fitting that there be a partnership between them in the matter of giving and receiving. That holy love, which is at times called spiritual, is content with the fruit of prayer; charity makes little earthly gifts. To help and to be helped in the spiritual conflict, to commend and be commended before the tribunal of Christ, this I think is the mark of holy love. But to what great heights in prayer do you think he rose who could thus raise up another by his merits?

If you have faith, everything you ask for in prayer, you will receive^[14]. To pray in faith means to pray in His name^[15], that is, to pray in His Person. In other words, as the heart grows in freedom from fear about His effectiveness and His will to be faithful, that is, His Providence, His space to pray in us is deepened. For this petition will not be driven completely by fear, but the growing desire for Him and His will. The Lord's prayer itself reflects this.

Let our prayer rise before You like and evening oblation...^[16]

I urge you then, first of all that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving should be offered for everyone, for kings and others in authority, so that we may be able to live peaceful and quiet lives with all devotion and propriety. To do this is right, and acceptable to God our Saviour: He wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth. For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself a human being, Christ Jesus, who offered himself as a ransom for all.^[17]



Christ lives to intercede for all humanity^[18]. As the capacity of the heart for prayer of faith grows, the prayer of the heart is more aware of that prayer being connected somehow with the prayer of Christ, of praying in His Name. Also the prayer of faith of the faithful, gathered in His Name^[19], that is, the prayer of the Church, participates especially in Jesus' action of intercession, His mediation, His priesthood. At the heart of the mission of the faithful, of the Church, is the prayer of faith or intercession, which effects and expresses that communion with all persons and which we share with Christ.

The sign and instrument of communion between persons and with God, the Church is a kind of Sacrament^[20], a communion which finds singular expression in the Sacred Liturgy. Prayer in the name of Christ leads towards its full earthly expression in the Liturgical actions of His Body, the Church. The Divine Office shares in that

status or dignity as a liturgical action, along with the Eucharist and the Sacraments. It is the Liturgy of the Hours.

Christ accomplishes ‘the work of redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God’^[21] in the Holy Spirit through the Church not only when the Eucharist is celebrated and the sacraments administered, but also in other ways, especially by praying the Liturgy of the Hours.^[22] Christ is present when His community comes together^[23], when the word of God is proclaimed and when the Church prays and sings^[24].

Assembled in the Sacred Liturgy as the Body of Christ we breathe the same air of faith. Incense used in worship acknowledges the utter holiness of God. As breathing is to the lungs, so prayer is to the heart^[25]. In the Liturgy, incense gives fragrance to the air and ascends to the throne of God with our prayer.

Intercession is a fundamental dimension to the Church’s nature, mission and action, which finds clarity of expression, focus and effectiveness in the Liturgy of the Hours. In Christ, such is our bond in intercession for all people that we no longer just pray for them, but with them or in their name. Such is the scope of intercession in Christ that we may give voice to praise on behalf of all creation, in the name of all creation. Intercession moves past the concerns of the *I* to the *we*.

Intercession also transcends the temporal. As one author writes, As she keeps her vigil, the Church affects the temporal rhythm of the cosmos, “In prayer, filled with expectation, hastening the coming of the day of the Lord”.^[26]

The Book of Revelations beautifully and powerfully portrays the mysterious bond of intercession with the history of salvation, with the intervention, the participation of God in human history and creation. Using imagery derived from the Temple and its liturgy, it depicts a dramatic vision of the heavenly liturgy before the throne of God. The earthly liturgy participates in the celestial one.

Then I saw, in the middle of the throne with its four living creatures and the circle of elders, a Lamb that seemed to have been sacrificed; it had seven horns, and it had seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits that God sent out over the whole world... The Lamb came forward to take the scroll from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne, and when he took it, the four living creatures prostrated themselves before him and with them the twenty four elders; each one of them was holding a harp and a bowl full of incense which are the prayers of the saints. Then they sang a new hymn: Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals...^[27]

Significantly they are holding a symbol of the psalms (the harp) as well as the prayers of the saints. He describes countless angels chanting (v. 11); echoed by all living things in creation- everything that lives in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and in the sea... (v. 13); the souls of the martyrs (6:9); and a huge number, impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language shouting their praise in a loud voice (7:9-10). After a few more verses depicting the victory of those who had been through the great trial (vv. 13-17), the Lamb breaks the seventh and last seal. Then follows a period of silence in heaven to precede and herald the coming of the Lord. The New Jerusalem Bible offers a succinct summary of these verses which symbolize the relationship between the intercession of the Church and the Lord’s coming. It titles the passage: The Prayers of the Saints bring the coming of the great Day nearer.

Next I saw seven trumpets being given to the seven angels who stand in the presence of God. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. A large quantity of incense was given him to offer with the prayers of the saints (i.e. of the faithful) on the golden altar that stood in front of the throne; and so from the angel’s hand the smoke of the incense went up in the presence of God and with it the prayers of the saints. Then the angel took the censer and filled it from the fire of the altar, which he then hurled down onto the earth; immediately there came the peals of thunder and flashes of lightning and the earth shook.^[28]

This striking imagery does not view or promote intercession as an effective means of invoking thunder and lightning upon one's opponents^[29]. Rather, it reflects a conviction that intercessory prayer is effective beyond the temporal realm. It is a nexus between God's plan of salvation and human history, not that the two are separated. Human history and creation is drawn up beyond the confines of the sequence of physical and political realities of cause and effect, into the liturgy of heaven. The immediacy of that liturgy is open to intercessory prayer. The mundane is part of the celestial. The all too specific secular world view gives way to the broad reality of the Sacred. The temporal view within the limits of human history dissolve in the prophetic vision of the eternal, Divine plan. Human events assume a salvific dimension as mystery and 'word' where God reveals Himself as he acts. Intercessory prayer enables us to be consciously open to participation in that eternal song of praise (*Canticum Laudis*), in the unfolding of His Will of Love in the here and now. It embraces all humanity and creation, as it enables one to recognise himself as an integral member of humanity and part of creation. It promotes the fulfilment of Jesus' Paschal mystery in the unfolding of history for the salvation of all people. Such is the expansive scope of the action and effect of intercessory prayer which leads to the recognition of our mutual participation, involvement and communion of destinies in the salvation of humanity and restoration of creation.

This scope of intercessory prayer does not exclude petition for the particular needs of persons. In Christ, the mediation of intercession has a divinely intended role of drawing the heart of individuals and humanity towards the heart of the indwelling God, into the unveiling and explication of the Divine Plan, into the sacramental dimension of our lives. Beyond merely secular and empirical evaluation, time, work and the events of our lives assume a new, transcendental or cosmic dimension of meaning as a meeting place with Him who acts out of Love and is Love. In fact, time and work - all our human activity- are experienced in a new way within that expansive view of intercession.

Each one of them was holding a harp and a bowl full of incense which are the prayers of the Church ^[30]



As part of the Sacred Liturgy of the Church, the prayer of the Body of Christ, the Liturgy of the Hours "celebrates" or explicitly recognises and allows us to live within that mystery of history as part of the Word of God (*Dei Verbum*), all of which give voice to Jesus' eternal glorification, His song of praise (*Canticum Laudis*^[31]) of the Father in time. The particular characteristic which ancient tradition has attached to the Liturgy of the Hours is that it should consecrate the course of day and night^[32]. As its name suggests, the Liturgy of the Hours sanctifies time and all human activity.^[33] Therefore the traditional sequence of the Hours has been restored for each to correspond more closely with its true canonical time (*veritas horarium*)^[34], as a kind of extension and preparation for the Eucharist^[35] in union with the Church in heaven^[36]. As we have said, Christian intercession recognises its origins in grace, that it is a sharing in Christ's mediation or 'prayer'. Prayer means more than words. The prayer of faith in us may be described as an attentive movement of the 'heart' towards the 'heart' of God.

In the heart of Christ the praise of God finds expression in human words of adoration, propitiation and intercession... He prays to the Father in the name of and for the good of all mankind.^[37] The Church continues the prayer of Christ.. There is an intimate and necessary relationship between the prayer of Christ and the whole of the human race^[38], especially the baptised^[39].

St. Augustine, in that famous passage, describes that intimate relationship between the prayer of the faithful, the 'saints' and the prayer of Christ.

He prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God. Therefore, let us acknowledge our voice in Him and His in us.^[40]

This action is of the Holy Spirit.

The heart breathing to the rhythm of His sighs...



Augustine's words are especially true in the Sacred Liturgy when the Church prays. The Liturgy of the Hours is a liturgical action^[41]. It shares in the dignity of the Sacred Liturgy. *Canticum Laudis* beautifully describes the Liturgy of the Hours as the culmination of Christian prayer, being a participation in the prayer and heart of Jesus and the sanctification of time.

Christian prayer is primarily the prayer of the entire community of mankind joined to Christ himself.^[42] Each individual has his part in this prayer which is common to the one Body, and it thus becomes the voice of the beloved Spouse of Christ, putting into words the wishes and desires of the whole Christian people and making intercession for the necessities common to all mankind. It obtains its unity from the heart of Christ himself. Our Redeemer, as He Himself had entered into life through His prayer and sacrifice, wished that this should not cease throughout the ages in His Mystical Body, the Church^[43], and so the official prayer of the Church is at the same time the very prayer which Christ Himself, together with His Body, addresses to the Father^[44]. Thus when the Divine Office is said, our voices re-echo in Christ and His in us.

In order that this shall come about it is necessary that that warm and living love for Scripture^[45] which emanates from the Liturgy of the Hours shall be renewed among all, so that in truth Sacred Scripture becomes the principal source of all Christian prayer. The psalms especially, showing as they do the action of God in the history of salvation, must be better understood by the People of God, and this will come about more easily if among the clergy there is promoted a deeper study of the psalms as they are used in the liturgy, and if this is then handed on to the faithful by efficient catechesis. Then this more fruitful use of the Scriptures in the Mass and in the Liturgy of the Hours will bring about a continuous meditation on the history of salvation and its continuation in the life of men.

Since the life of Christ in His Mystical Body perfects and elevates the personal life of each of the faithful, there can be no opposition between the prayer of Christ and the personal prayer of the individual, but instead the relationship between them is strengthened by the Divine Office. Mental prayer is nourished by the readings and psalms and other parts of the Liturgy of the Hours; and if the method and form of the celebration is chosen which must help the persons taking part, one's personal prayer forms a clear link between the liturgy and the whole life of the Christian, since every hour of the day and night itself is itself a kind of *leitourgia* wherein they give themselves to the ministry of the love of God and their fellow men, and are joined to the actions of Christ who by his life among men and by his sacrifice sanctified the life of men. This deepest truth of the Christian life is shown forth and at the same time brought about by the Liturgy of the Hours, and so it is offered to all the faithful, even to those who are not bound by law to recite it.^[46]

The General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours then expands this point. There can be no Christian prayer without the action of the Holy Spirit. He unites the whole Church and leads us through the Son to the Father^[47]. Prayer expresses the very essence of the Church as community ... Community prayer, however, has a special dignity since Christ Himself said, "Where ever two or more are gathered in my name, I am in their midst"^[48]. In this context, I would like to refer to the description of prayer found in our Capuchin Constitutions.

Prayer to God, as the breath of love, originates from a movement of the Holy Spirit by which the interior person listens to the voice of God speaking to his heart^[49].

In John's gospel Jesus promises the intercession of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate of the saints^[50]. St. Paul also writes about the intercession of the Holy Spirit who initiates that prayer of faith in us. The impulse of the Spirit gives prayer a momentum and movement beyond petition towards an intercession which transcends our frail and limited words.

The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness, for when we do not know how to pray properly, then the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs that cannot be put into words; and He who can see into all hearts knows what the Spirit means because the prayers that the Spirit makes for God's holy people are always according to the mind of God.^[51]

The Holy Spirit is present to intercede in the depths of the heart. The Spirit of Christ leads the heart into the heart of Christ and His intercession and thanksgiving on behalf of all humanity; into communion of heart or will with the Father who wants all to be saved. Indeed, the very Love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.^[52] Through the working of the Holy Spirit in the prayer of faith, the Word utters Himself and the Father's name unto Love in the one praying. In this way, through faith, Jesus Himself becomes our prayer.^[53]

This depth in personal prayer is not defeated necessarily by active participation in the public action of the Liturgy. Instead that personal prayer tends towards completion in that communion of persons enacted by the Church at prayer. So the faithful must seek God and penetrate ever more deeply through prayer into the mystery of Christ. With that same mind that was in our Redeemer, they should praise God and pray to Him^[54]. In the assembly, by the action of grace, the unity of voices promotes that unity of hearts. It nurtures the bond of charity where God abides. Thus, the Liturgy of the Hours, like other liturgical actions, is not a private function, but pertains to the whole body of the Church. It manifests the Church and has an effect upon it^[55]. Indeed, it is a sharing in the reconciling priestly office of Christ.

In the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church exercises the priestly office of Christ her head and constantly offers God a sacrifice of praise, a “verbal sacrifice that is offered every time we acknowledge His name” (Heb 23:15). This prayer is □the voice of the bride addressing her bridegroom; it is the very prayer which Christ himself, together with His Body, addresses to the Father (SC 84). “Hence all who perform this service are not only fulfilling the duty of the Church, but also are sharing in the greatest honour accorded to Christ's spouse, for by offering these praises to God they are standing before God's throne in the name of the Church their mother”.^[56]

And so, the prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours is identified with Jesus' own prayer to the Father, which transcends our temporal confines.

My song is of my Beloved ... as fragrant as frankincense ^[57]



y now my emphases should be clear. By prayer of faith I mean that Trinitarian prayer of the disciple, that is, prayer of the heart which originates in God through the operation of the Holy Spirit, in Christ or in His Name, and is epitomized in the Sacred Liturgy, including in its particular way the Liturgy of the Hours, as this prayer in the communion of saints. In this context, intercession is more than petition. As the prayer of Jesus, it includes praise, thanksgiving and adoration. More than an isolated action in the course of time, the prayer of faith is a disposition of the heart which transcends time and place.

In the Liturgy of the Hours, including the Songs of the Psalms, naturally, the faithful pray united with Christ as His Body, His Spouse. Indeed Jesus is present among them to pray in them, as they pray in His Name. In His prayer they participate in his Song of Praise, the Liturgy of heaven, in the name of the Church our Mother. This is intercession. Intercession means to pray for/with others, indeed all humanity, with/to God Himself. This prayer shares in the divine mission of the Word to glorify the Father in the salvation of men, the sanctification of time, making new all things in creation.

The Church finds her existence and meaning in that mission to which He calls us. Contemplative communities participate in that salvific intercession in a particular way. Called to make that life of prayer their priority of action, they aim to live in utter responsiveness, openness and availability to the prompting of the Voice of the Beloved. With/for the whole Church, they give themselves to Jesus' Prayer. They are called to be totally involved consciously, deliberately, actively, fruitfully in Jesus' intercession, for the sake of Jesus, the Church and

the world. Their mission, their hidden opus devolves around the Liturgy of the Hours, the so called opus Dei - the Liturgical prayer of the Psalms and the Word of God.

A manifestation of Divine Love, their intercession is at the heart of their hidden apostolic fruitfulness^[58]. Propelled by grace in the prayer of faith into that expansive and inclusive relationship with all persons, that communion of persons is also the image and likeness of God. It too is Love or Charity in the flesh, that is, realised in human beings. Intercession produces in them that Divine Charity which comes from the heart of Jesus. Then in the Liturgy of the Hours they give life to the world with the voice of Christ and the Church, in whose spiritual Motherhood they share.

As well as praising God, the Church's liturgy expresses the hopes and prayers of all the Christian faithful and intercedes before Christ and through Him before the Father for the salvation of the whole world^[59]. This voice is not only of the Church but of Christ. It is in the name of Christ that she prays, and so the Church continues to offer that prayer and entreaty which Christ offered during His life on earth, and which therefore has a unique effectiveness. Thus the Church community exercises a true motherhood towards souls who are to be led to Christ, not only by Charity, example and works of penance, but also by prayer.^[60]

Also,

This Congregation stresses the importance of those who in solitude and silence, in constant prayer and willing penance, offer to God a sublime sacrifice of praise, imaging Christ in contemplation on the mountain^[61]. At the same time, although favouring their desires and wishes, the Congregation strongly encourages these religious to enter worthily, attentively and devoutly into that colloquy between God and mankind to which they are deputed by the law of the Church; to celebrate the liturgy with a dedication of spirit and resolve of mind to be the embodiment of the Church as it is a community of prayer.^[62]

The solemnity with which they carry out the Liturgy of the Hours is also at issue. That highlights the importance attached to the public prayer of the Church as it is gathered together with Christ its Bridegroom in the Holy Spirit and addresses praise to the Father. The solemnity of the office is evidence also that those who, so to speak, exist in the very heart of the Church, value the Church's prayer, that is, the prayer of Christ and His Body to the Father, and they look on that prayer as the extension and reminder of the Eucharistic celebration through the hours of the day. The solemnity is also the sign that these religious regard the exchange or dialogue between God and His children as something not to be interrupted during the day and that they are more completely fulfilling the duty of working toward the building up and growth of Christ's Mystical Body, as well as towards the well being of the particular Churches - a primary concern of those leading the contemplative life.^[63]

Both a contemplative nun and patroness of the Missions, St. Therese of Lisieux wrote in her Autobiography,

If the Church was a body composed of different members, it couldn't lack the noblest part of all; it must have a Heart, and a Heart burning with love. And I realised that this love alone was the true motive force which enabled the other members of the Church to act; if it ceased to function, the Apostles would forget to preach the gospel, the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. Love, in fact, is the vocation which includes all others; its is a universe of its own, comprising all time and space - it's eternal^[64].

Without that Heart and that Love, the Church would not pray. Without that Prayer, the Church would not Love.

The Divine Office

The enhancement of our active participation in the Liturgy of the Hours, and its fruitfulness, in some measure will depend on our celebration of it as Liturgy. The celebration of the Divine Office is a liturgical action^[65]. It is the action of Jesus,^[66] His prayer.^[67] The Liturgy is not just something we do for God, an obligation we fulfil for the sake of God. Like the prayer of faith itself, it is something He does in us. Jesus Christ is really present to accomplish this action in us.

In the heart of Christ the praise of God finds expression in human words of adoration, propitiation and intercession...He prays to the Father in the name of and for the good of all mankind...The Church continues the prayer of Christ...There is an intimate and necessary relationship between the prayer of Christ and the prayer of the whole human race,^[68]

especially the baptised^[69]. One who prays the psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours does not say them in his own name. He prays with and in the name of the whole Body of Christ. In fact, he prays them in the person of Christ Himself^[70]. For the Church, the Psalms are also Christian prayer. The prayer of faith in Christ in the Sacred Liturgy expresses and realizes an intimate relationship and identification among the faithful and all persons. That prayer in the heart of Christ finds a singular voice in the liturgical praying of the Psalms.

Some Liturgical Elements in the Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgical reforms initiated by Pius X and Pius XII culminated in those articulated by The Second Vatican Council. These attempt to restore the simplicity and clarity of the signs in the Sacred Liturgy. In this way the inner nature of the Sacred Liturgy as a participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ may be manifested more clearly for the active and fruitful participation of the faithful. In order, however, that the spirit of the new liturgy of the hours may not fail to be understood by some people, serious thought must be devoted to those elements of the General Instruction that contribute to a more complete celebration.^[71] Here we refer to some of the more general elements.

The Assembly

The Liturgical assembly is a sign of the Church as the Body of Christ where He acts. Jesus is present in the Assembly. Optimally, the Sacred Liturgy - including the Liturgy of the Hours- is celebrated within a visible assembly. The Divine Office is a communal celebration^[72]. It is not private prayer in common. Joined to and accompanying the Liturgy of Heaven, the communal dimension extends beyond the visible assembly.^[73] The physical elements of the liturgical spaces ought be arranged in a way which integrates the liturgical spaces with that of the community to signify and promote the realization that the whole assembly, the Body of Christ, is the celebrant of the Liturgy.

The Liturgy of the Hours connects with the Liturgies of the Mass. Both incorporate the Liturgy of the Word. The Liturgy of the Hours is an extension of the celebration of the Mass.^[74] The disposition of the liturgical spaces also should reflect this intimate relationship. As the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are essentially related, so too is the Liturgy of the Hours related to the Word and the Eucharist. The Lectern and the Altar are the two tables of the Sacred liturgy where the Assembly is nourished by the Word of God and Body of Christ. Both Tables should be significant in the Liturgy of the Hours.

While the Ambo (the space for the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word) and the Sanctuary (the space for the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist) are distinct spaces, their connection is to be signified, e.g. by the use of the same decorous materials in the construction and presentation of both the Altar and Lectern. Both are tables, i.e. the lectern is more than a simple book stand, but a table set for the feast of the Word of God. A

distinctive use of floor coverings can define and dignify spaces. An integrated arrangement of seating in respect to these spaces can evoke spontaneously a sense of assembly.


The Liturgy of the Hours is a Celebration of the Word^[75] with a proclamation of the Word, both psalms and readings^[76], the possibility of a homily and the assembly's response of petitions. The Liturgy of the Hours is also structured as a dialogue with and in the Scripture.^[77] The Psalms are part of the Scripture and part of that dialogue.

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's Word and of Christ's Body...For from the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the Word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church.^[78]


Let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for we speak to Him when we pray; we hear him when we read the divine sayings.^[79]

In regard to readings, especially the readings from Scripture, the understanding of which is the reason for all other readings, note that they are an encounter and dialogue with God. They are the praise of the goodness of the one who through his word, passed down to us in Christ and in the Church, has ushered us into the eternal colloquy of His love. This is the clear explanation of why the readings in the liturgy may also be regarded as the praise of God.^[80] But in order for the readings to be genuine prayer as they are proclaimed, every care must be exercised that they are read clearly and distinctly and in such a way as to be truly intelligible to all (see n. 283). The only acceptable melody for sung readings is one that ensures that the texts are heard and understood.^[81]

Time

 In the Renewal of the Divine Office - now called the Liturgy of the Hours - the times for the celebration of the Divine Office were restored to correspond more closely to the canonical hours^[82] This restoration highlights the role of the Divine Office in the sanctification of the day, of time and human activity^[83]. Each hour has its own character^[84]. Let us take the example of the Office of Readings.

The Nocturnal Character of the Office of Readings

 In the Divine Office, the celebration of the Office of Readings may be extended with the use of more Psalms, some Old Testament Canticles and Gospel reading. Both *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (89) and General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours (57-58) urged that the celebration of the Office of Readings or Vigils retain its character as nocturnal praise. [In his work, Steindl-Rast refers to the celebration of Office of Readings (Vigils) as the night watch, the womb of silence and the longest hour.^[85]]

Three motives may be cited for the night celebration of the Office of Readings as a Vigil. The first is its connection with the heart of Christian Liturgy, namely, the Easter Vigil. The second is its role in the sanctification of the day and night. The third is the biblical admonition echoed down through the ages through the Fathers, monastic tradition and spiritual writers to pray at night. This practice of night prayer emerges from the vigilant character of the prayer of faith and of the heart that prays without ceasing.

The Easter Vigil. Saint Augustine writes, The vigil of this night is so important that it is called the Vigil as if demanding exclusively for itself a term which is common for the rest...We spend the night in vigil, the night on which the Lord rose, and began for us in His own flesh that life where there is neither death nor sleep. Therefore, as we sing in our long vigil to Him who has risen, we will reign with Him in life without end^[86] He

calls it the mother of all holy vigils. In the renewal of the Easter Celebrations, the Vigil takes place entirely at night^[87]. The full meaning of the Vigil is a waiting for the coming of the Lord (ibid 80).

Just as the celebration of Easter extends throughout the year in the Celebration of the Day of the Lord, or the Day of the Resurrection (Sunday), Sunday is the preferred day for the celebration of Vigils. Thus the breviary offers Canticles and Gospel readings of the Resurrection for each Sunday and Solemnity to extend the Office of Readings as a Vigil in this way:

Office of Readings. During the week: six psalms may be said, thus: three psalms of week I (or week II), followed by the biblical reading of the day with its responsory; the psalms of the same day for week III (or IV), followed by the patristic reading of the day with its responsory.

On Sundays and holydays: there may be six psalms and three canticles for a prolonged vigil, in the way already outlined, namely: three psalms and a biblical reading with its responsory; three psalms and a patristic reading with its responsory; three canticles, a gospel, and the Te Deum.^[88]

The nocturnal character also connects it with the exhortation to pray at night.

The Fathers and spiritual writers have very often exhorted the faithful, especially those who live a contemplative life, to pray at night. By this they seek to encourage them to look forward to the Lord's coming: "At midnight there was a cry, The bridegroom is here! Go out to meet Him (Matth 25:6)." "So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep" (Mark 13:35-36). It is therefore praiseworthy to retain the nocturnal character of the Office of Readings.^[89]

As the laws or traditions of each community permit, the office of readings is to keep its character as nocturnal praise (see nn 57-58); especially on Sundays and more solemn days, a vigil may be added. This is especially suited to those who live the contemplative life; the Fathers and spiritual writers have repeatedly exhorted them to nocturnal prayer to express and awaken the expectation of the Lord's Second Coming. All therefore who retain its nocturnal character for the office of readings are to be commended.^[90]


Vigilance is an integral aspect of repentance and the maturation of the prayer of faith. It is that custody of the heart where the Holy Spirit constantly seeks to awaken us to keep watch.^[91]

Jesus calls his hearers to conversion and faith, but also to watchfulness. In prayer the disciple keeps watch, attentive to Him Who Is and Him Who Comes, in memory of His first coming in the lowliness of the flesh and of the hope of the second coming in glory. In communion with their master, the disciples' prayer is a battle; by only keeping watch in prayer can one avoid falling into temptation (cf Luke 22:40,46). We live in a time of watching and waiting (cf Matthew 25:1,13; Mark 13:33-37; 1 Jn 2:18;4:3; 1 Tim 4:1).^[92]

While an attentive celebration of the Office or Readings at a night hour may require some self-discipline regarding sleep (even to ensure that one has enough sleep by going earlier to bed), its character or mood is not that of self-mortification. It is not a penitential practice. Instead, we see that the nocturnal character of Vigils connects it with the Resurrection of Jesus and the disposition of watchfulness and joyful attentiveness for the Risen Lord who comes. It is a celebration of the Christ the Light, Risen from death, dispelling the darkness of the human condition. From the silence of the Night, God opens our lips for praise and intercession as the first and continuous act of the day - for ourselves, all humanity and all creation.

Our practice^[93] of celebrating the Office of Readings early in the morning is founded on these reasons. The hour of 4:30 am is chosen to integrate it more easily with Lauds and Eucharist via the *lectio divina*. It also celebrates the communion we enjoy with other contemplative communities who celebrate the Office of Readings or Vigils at the same time.^[94]

Psalms as Word of God and Christian Prayer

he Psalms occupy a unique place in the Liturgy, particularly the Liturgy of the Hours. “The psalms constitute the master work of prayer in the Old Testament, prayed and fulfilled by Christ.”^[95] The Apostolic Church recognised the Psalms as fulfilled in Jesus, especially His Paschal Mystery^[96]. There has been a long tradition of interpreting the Psalms as either *vox Christi* or *vox Ecclesiae* (or both) particularly in the Western Church^[97]. These interpretations have been reflected in the composition of Antiphons, headings (or titles^[98]) and Psalm collects which were intended to Christologise the Psalms.^[99]

In the General Instruction to the Liturgy of the Hours, Chapter Three speaks about the psalms and their close relationship with Christian prayer. Sometimes a difficulty arises (n.106) when the sentiments of one praying with the psalms are different to those expressed in the Psalms of the Hour. Then it can be difficult to make the psalms one’s own prayer.

In response to this difficulty, the General Instruction^[100] describes the depths or levels of meaning found in the Psalms. These levels of meaning correspond to the traditional “senses” of the Sacred Scripture^[101]. The fruit of careful study, a grasp of these dimensions of meaning can promote an ongoing and deeper interiorisation of the psalms in personal prayer. “The person praying the Psalms is conscious of their importance for Christian living by keeping to their literal meaning.”^[102] What does the author of the Psalm mean? Coming to a literal interpretation can be a little complex and far from spontaneous.^[103] While possibly fruitful, an uninformed, subjective interpretation alone is inadequate and often difficult to achieve. An expectation for a spontaneous or self evident ‘personal’ meaning of a Psalm text may lead eventually to a dissatisfaction with the Psalms. They do not always submit readily to a particular sentiment one may like to impose. Neither the authentic literal sense nor the value of a Psalm can be gauged by one’s capacity to resonate with the text emotionally. Rather, one’s capacity to resonate with a Psalm text and make it one’s own will be enhanced significantly when based on an appreciation of the other levels of legitimate meaning discernible in the Psalms. These will come to light through a deliberate, gradual, reflective study of these levels of meaning in the Psalm itself.

Apart from the literal sense of the text, the General Instruction goes on to describe two others. It describes how the psalms may be interpreted as fulfilled in Jesus and as a song of the Church.

108 Whoever prays the psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours does not say them in his own name so much as in the name of the whole Body of Christ, in fact, in the person of Christ Himself. If he keeps this in mind, difficulties disappear, even if while saying the psalms his own feelings differ from those expressed by the psalmist...In the Divine Office, however, someone saying the Hour alone is not praying the psalms privately but recites them in the name of the Church and according to the sequence given in her public prayer. Whoever says them in the name of the Church can always find a reason for joy or sorrow, finding applicable to himself the words of the apostle: Rejoice with those who rejoice and be sad with those in sorrow (Rom 12:15); human weakness and selfishness is thus healed by charity so that the mind and heart may harmonise with the voice.

109 Whoever says the psalms in the name of the Church should pay attention to the full meaning of the psalms, especially the messianic understanding which led the Church to adopt the psalter. The messianic meaning is made completely manifest in the New Testament...Following this path, the Fathers took the whole psalter and explained it as a prophecy about Christ and His Church; and for this reason psalms were chosen for the Sacred Liturgy. Even if certain artificial interpretations were sometimes accepted, generally both the Fathers and the Liturgy rightly heard in the psalms Christ calling out to His Father, and the Father speaking to His Son; they even recognised in them the voice of the Church, the apostles and martyrs. This method of interpretation also flourished in the Middle Ages; in many manuscripts of the psalter written at the time, the Christological meaning is explained at the heading of each psalm. This Christological interpretation in no way refers only to those psalms which are considered messianic but also extends it to many in which without doubt these are mere appropriations. Such appropriations, however, have been commended by the tradition of the Church.^[104]

In the last place, I would include the subjective spiritual interpretation, which is a personally accommodated sense. Given an appreciation of the other senses, the psalms have the capacity to draw the heart of the one praying them into a much broader field of vision, both of the psalms and himself as well as his present circumstances within the overall context of salvation history, the Church and community of humanity. Praying the psalms becomes less introverted. An awareness of the other levels of meaning increases the subjective relevance of the Psalms, which in turn may form and nourish personal prayer. The tendency to filter the Psalm text through personal feeling is transcended.

Within the Liturgy itself, the Psalms are an expression, experience and enactment of the prayer of Christ, in the Church for and with the whole of humanity. In this context, our participation in the Liturgy becomes less focussed on personal effort to recite the Psalm. Rather it occasions being swept up into the priestly intercession or prayer of Jesus for every human being. One may be assumed into this action or operation of Jesus, not alone, but with every human being, indeed all creation. In that lifting up, all creation, especially human beings, are 'elevated' with those praying. I no longer pray for them, but with them. They are with me, part of me mutually, in that communion of persons, that act of love realised within the prayer of Jesus Himself. Thus the praying of the psalms in this awareness plucks a person out of his keyhole view both of the Psalms and the outside world to embrace all other persons, the vast majority of whom he has never met but whom he knows through his own self knowledge and in relation to God's plan of love for every person. Furthermore, this experience of solidarity in the prayer of Jesus' heart transcends the individuation of the pray-er by time and place. This communion includes the very saints and angels in heaven, and those gone before us. The prayer of faith transcends the boundaries of death itself. Those who have died are closer more intimately or 'spiritually' in the movement of prayer than when they were physically present in our midst. So we can justly pray for/with those who have died.

Hence praying of the Psalms in the Liturgy must be much more than an exercise of personal piety or the fulfilment of an obligation. It has to be more than a scratching about to invent a meaning or establish some points of subjective relevance with the Psalm. Psalm praying, especially in the Liturgy of the Hours, is a vehicle for the action of liturgical solidarity or communion of charity among people which finds its origin, full utterance and fulfilment in Jesus Christ. The inspired words of the Psalm become the wings of prayer. The heart is drawn aloft by the Holy Spirit into communion with the Father in Jesus and with all humanity on earth and in heaven and with all creation. Awareness of this is a grace. This grace will flourish with practice and personal application.

Some suggestions




Outside the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours: Careful study is needed to fathom something of the depths of meaning in a Psalm. The Jerusalem Bible, among others, has an introduction to the Psalms. This is complemented with useful footnotes and cross references which offer some insight into the Psalms in their local context as the Songs 'of David' and of Israel, while sometimes referring the passages the Psalms to other parts of the Scripture. In this way the notes and references can help place parts of the Psalm in the general context of the overall unity of the Scriptures, of which the Paschal Mystery of Jesus is the key. A reliable exegetical commentary on the Psalms would be helpful. I have also found Hebrew midrashic and talmudic commentaries beneficial. Patristic commentaries offer valuable insights^[105]. While there may not be many Patristic commentaries on the Book of Psalms as such, a Scriptural cross reference in the index of the book can lead to Psalm texts. Comments by great spiritual writers can be found in the same way.

Appreciation of the Psalms as Word of God grows gradually. Therefore such a study needs to be done with prayerfulness and calm, keeping in mind the four levels of meaning: a) What is the author's meaning? How is the Psalm a song of David and a song of Israel? b) What is the meaning of the Psalm in relation to Christ? How has Jesus fulfilled the Psalm? What sense does the Psalm have on His lips? What light can the rest of Scripture cast on it? c) What meaning does the Psalm have in relation to the Church? How is it fulfilled in her? What sense does it have on her lips? d) Does the Psalm take flesh in you? What light does it throw on you and your circumstances today? As an exercise to help focus on these aspects, one could try to compose personal Titles and Psalm Collects.

Deepening our appreciation of the Psalms as Word of God takes time. However, the broader our familiarity with the Scriptures as a whole becomes, the more ‘articulate’ the Psalms will be. It may be counter-productive to try to squeeze out these levels of meaning from each verse of a Psalm. Nor may this be necessary. These four facets are useful tools to enhance our active participation in the praying of the Psalms during the Liturgy of the Hours. These questions are prompts. However, the insights gained from such a prayerful study help make the Psalms our own. In turn the Psalms can expand the scope of our prayer both during the Hours, and indeed beyond them into individual prayer.

During the Celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. Here I would like to repeat two age old practical suggestions. I have found these indispensable for a fruitful participation in the Liturgy of the Hours. They are return points. It is necessary to return to them from time to time, especially if praying the Divine Office becomes ‘arduous.’ These points interconnect and overlap. Let us call them unison of voice and heart; focus or inward composure assisted by a deliberate pace of recitation and the use of silence.


Unison of Voice and Heart

ow to engage the heart and mind with the voice? How to focus the mind and heart through the words and on the words of the psalm? We have already discussed some suggestions to help make the prayer of the psalms one’s own. However, the unison of heart with the voice is greater than the achievement of personal harmony between the two. Rather, the unison of heart and voice in the assembly itself is a fruit of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. Presuming appropriate personal dispositions, the prayer of the assembly in unison of voices promotes unison of hearts. The celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours bears within it the seed of fraternal charity and nourishes us in the Spirit of Christ. Indeed, the Liturgy of the Hours is the prayer of the assembly or the fraternity.^[106] Hence, it is important to remain faithful to the mode and rhythm of praying the psalms adopted within the assembly.

Earlier Capuchin Constitutions express it this way:

The divine office shall be said with great devotion, due attention, gravity, union of heart; the pauses being properly observed and the voice pitched neither too high nor too low, but moderately, in a monotone. The friars shall endeavour to sing the praises of God more with the mind than with the lips, lest they leave themselves open to the reproach our most sweet Saviour addressed to the Jews: “This people honours Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (Matthew 15:8; Mark 7:6). Matins and Lauds shall be said at midnight (*media nocte*), after the example of the royal psalmist and of the saints and primitive Fathers of our Order, so that our houses may echo, day and night (*diu nocteque*), with the praises of the Lord. And no other office shall be said in choir.^[107]

Focus or Inward Composure

ocus of the mind and heart is supported by a deliberative and reflective pace punctuated by silent pauses.^[108] I find a deliberative pace is needed to keep my mind and heart in focus on the psalm and to ponder the text’s dimensions of meaning attentively, that is, in a listening mode for the voice of the Lord. Singing can enhance this, but may not always be possible. I acknowledge this to be my own need to pray the psalms thoughtfully. Yet there always seems to be a tendency to gather momentum in praying the psalms. This can lead to carelessness or give way to preoccupation or distraction (which is inevitable from time to time). The psalmody is already marked for pauses (*), even if placed artificially at times .

So inward composure refers to the attempt to attune the mind and heart for prayer. We ready ourselves prior to the Liturgy for that inward dialogue of the psalms. This still recollection will grow beyond the Liturgy of the Hours to the whole day in the constant prayer of the contemplative heart. Celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours requires personal preparation. This may include attempts to achieve that stillness of heart, or to focus on the dimensions of the psalms. Such matters require some discipline. It is always better to arrive for the Liturgy

prepared in this way, rather than be filled with distractions, e.g. the work one is doing. (Distractions are not the same as critical concerns, either ours or someone else's. Such issues need to be brought to prayer. These matters form the texture of our life and are focal points where we need to discern the Lord's presence. Furthermore, I believe we need to recall, as explicitly as possible, those with whom we have been called to pray, and what we know of their situation of need or gratitude.)

Punctuality is a good discipline to promote our inward recollection in the place where we pray. Sleep is too. In regard to sleep, the real discipline may not be in sleep deprivation. Instead, it can be a question of getting enough rest so as not to be fighting off sleep during the Liturgy of the Hours, especially the night hours. Taking a short rest can be a form of discipline, especially since so much of our ego and escapism can be tied up in getting a job done.

As a summary, I would like to repeat the words^[109] of Pope John Paul II:

The value of Liturgy of the Hours is enormous. Through it all the faithful, but especially the clergy and the religious, fulfil the role of prime importance: Christ's prayer goes on in the world. The Holy Spirit himself intercedes for God's people (see Rom 8:27). The Christian community, with praise and thanksgiving, glorifies the wisdom, the power, the providence, and the salvation of our God. In this prayer of praise we lift up our hearts to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, bringing with us the joys and sorrows of all our brothers and sisters in the world. And our prayer becomes likewise a school of sensitivity, making us aware of how much our destinies are linked together in the human family. Our prayer becomes a school of love - a special kind of Christian consecrated love, by which we love the world, but with the heart of Christ. Through this prayer of Christ to which we give our voice, our day is sanctified, our activities transformed, our actions made holy. We pray the same psalms that Jesus prayed and come into personal contact with Him - the person to whom all Scripture points, the good to which all history is directed. In our celebration of the word of God, the mystery of Christ opens up before us and envelopes us. And through union with our Head, Jesus Christ, we become ever more increasingly one with all the members of His Body. As never before, it becomes possible for us to reach out and embrace the world, but to embrace it with Christ: with authentic generosity, with pure and effective love, in service, in healing, and in reconciliation.^[109]

We may conclude this reflection with a story from the life of the nineteenth century Russian Orthodox saint Seraphim.

Staretz Serafim^[110] hardly slept, lying in his cell on sacks filled with stones, or sitting on the floor, his back rested against the wall. Most of the night he prayed. As the lives of others became part of his own, his prayers of intercession acquired new concreteness.

Paul, still his neighbour, felt it right to approach him with careful remonstrance. "Father, this sea of lights always burning before the icons in your cell, and you so seldom there! It might so easily cause a fire."

"No. No. It won't. Not for another few years. Then, fire will announce to you my birth, my death as some would say."

"But all these candles..."

"I must have them. It is difficult sometime," he explained, "I get so deeply concerned with the issues of the lives before me that, in my weakness, I can't keep in mind all the others too. So there they burn, these candles. When one of them goes out, I know for whom of the absent I must pray. There are so many of them, and I can think of no better way. Their lives, the lives of these neighbours of ours, they are our very flesh."

He was gaining clear insight into the physical and spiritual fabric of the lives of others; he understood their happiness or sorrow better than they did themselves. The tidings of his insight and foresight spread further afield.^[111]

Abbreviations

SC	Sacrosanctum Concilium 4 December 1963
CapCc45	Capuchin Constitutions 1945
CapCc90	Capuchin Constitutions 1990
CAP	Martimort, A.G. (Editor). The Church at Prayer
Cat	Catechism of the Catholic Church
DOL	Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979
GILH	General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours
UQI	Universi qui Officium
VC	Vita Consecrata
VS	Venite Seorsum

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Endnotes

¹ I have tried to explore intercession as the experience of □ universal solidarity in prayer, and outline an understanding of the Liturgy of the Hours in that context. The suggestions at the end offer a way to help to enter the psalms so that their prayer becomes more ones own; to celebrate the Hours as Liturgy with one’s attention upon the office of intercession while doing so.

² Cf Psalm 141:2

³ Cf Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-31; Phil 4:6; 1 Pet 5:7.

⁴ Matthew 6:7

⁵ Cf Exodus 16:7; Psalm 78; 106:32; Judith 8:11-17.

⁶ James 4:3

⁷ Since Abraham, intercession on behalf of another has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God’s mercy. In the age of the Church, Christian intercession participates in Christ’s, as an expression of the communion of saints (Catechism 2635) Cf. Abraham, Gen 18:24; Moses, Exodus 32:11; Psalm 99:6, etc; Jeremiah, 2 Mc 15:14; Jer 42:2; the angels Tob 3:17. There are numerous other examples (Esdra 9:6-15; Nehemiah 1:4-11; Jonah 2:3-10; Tobit 3:11-16; Judith 9:2-14; Esther 4:17; etc.)

⁸ Matthew 6:8

⁹ Intercession is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as Jesus did. He is the one intercessor with the Father on behalf of all men, especially sinners (Rom 8:34; 1 Jn 2:1; 1 Tim 2:5-8). He is “able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). The Holy Spirit Himself intercedes for men (Rom 8:26-27). *Catechism* 2634. In other words, in Christ, petition develops into intercession. As stated elsewhere in this reflection, intercession is more than petition. It also includes praise, thanksgiving and adoration.

¹⁰ Cf John 6:44,65; 14:6-7; Eph 2:18; Matthew 11:27

¹¹ James 4:1-10; 1 Pet 5:5-9

¹² Cf footnote 25

¹³ The Second Life of St Francis by Thomas of Celano Book Two Chapter 67, titled How an abbot felt the power of St. Francis □ prayer (*St. Francis of Assisi- Writings and Early Biographies English Omnibus of Sources for the Life of St Francis*. Edited by MARION A. HABIG, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1973. pp445-446)

¹⁴ Matthew 21:22

¹⁵ Cf John 14:13,26; 15:16 ,21; 16:23-26; Acts 2:21, etc

¹⁶ Cf Psalm 141:2

¹⁷ 1 Tim 2:1-5

¹⁸ He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them Heb 7:25.

¹⁹ Matthew 18:20

²⁰ *Lumen Gentium* n.1

²¹ These are the dual ends of the Sacred Liturgy, cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* n.5

²² SC nn.83,98

²³ The community gathered or called by the Lord: *ἐκκλησία* - *Ecclesia* or Church.

²⁴ SC n.7. This paragraph comes from the General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours n.13. On the relationship between the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours as preparation and extension, see GILH n.12

²⁵ Where does prayer come from? Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole man who prays. But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times). According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain. *Catechism* 2562. The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place 'to which I withdraw.' The heart is our hidden centre, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of the covenant. (*Catechism* 2563). On 'heart' in the Scriptures, see New Jerusalem Bible, Genesis 8:21^c. "Heart (καρδία): not simply the physical organ but the spiritual centre of man's being, man as made in the image of God, his deepest and truest self, or the inner shrine, to be entered only through sacrifice and death, in which the mystery of the union between the divine and the human is consummated. 'I called with my whole heart, says the psalmist - that is, with my body, soul and spirit' (JOHN KLIMAKOS, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* Step 28). Heart has thus an all embracing significance: prayer of the heart means prayer not just of the emotions and affections, but of the whole person, including the body." *Philokalia* Vol.1 pp.361-362. Cf ANDRÉ LOUF, *Teach us to Pray*, pp.16-22

²⁶ 2 Peter 3:12; ANDRÉ LOUF, *Teach us to Pray* p.80.

²⁷ Rev. 5:6-9

²⁸ Rev. 8:2-5. This image of the fullness of redemption may offer a further depth of meaning to Jesus' words in Luke 12:49, in the chapter following Jesus' teaching on prayer.

²⁹ See the gospel episode involving the □ sons of thunder in Luke 9:54.

³⁰ Rev 5:8

³¹ Cf. *Canticum Laudis* 1

³² GILH 10; cf SC 83-84

³³ Cf GILH 10-11

³⁴ GLIH 10; SC 94

³⁵ GILH 12

³⁶ GILH 15-16

³⁷ CL 3

³⁸ CL 6

³⁹ CL 7

⁴⁰ Commentary on Psalm 85; cf CL 7; *Catechism* 2616. I would like to cite here Gertrud of Helfta's beautiful attempt to describe the relationship between the prayer of faith and the action of Jesus: O love, play most dulcetly on that very bright lyre of the throat of my spouse Jesus so that He Himself, God of my life, may on my behalf sound the first voice of praise for Himself and may thus envelop both my life and my soul in the delight of His praise...O when will the strings of my desire be fitted onto those seraphic lutes that without ceasing proclaim to You the ineffable □holy□, so that in Your presence the joy and jubilation of my heart may sound in unison with the blessed ones in singing that same praise...There, into the golden censer of Your divine heart, where the most pleasant aromatic thyme of eternal love continuously burns up in Your praise, I also throw the minutest grain of my heart. I yearn for and desire that it, too, my vile and unworthy heart, made passionately alive through the breath of Your Spirit, may cross over into the one brazier of Your praise, and that the deep sighs for You (which, because of my long expectation I draw from the abyss of the earth) may be everlasting praise and glory to You...At this point, as if all of you, clinging to God, your Lover, pray to the Lord that He Himself with his much beloved genitrix, the virgin Mary, and with all the heavenly militia, offer Himself as a sacrifice of jubilation in the cheerful festival of His merriest love; and that He Himself, the most dulcet cithara player, sing first with the voice of His Divinity and with the cithara of His humanity... *Spiritual Exercises* cf V: 48-54 VI 184-197; 260-264; 274-285; 364-384; 418-9; 422-427

⁴¹ It is distinct from other forms of non-liturgical prayer or pious exercises.

⁴² Cf. SC 83

⁴³ Cf. MD 2

⁴⁴ Cf. SC 84

⁴⁵ Cf. SC 24

⁴⁶ CL 8. The bold emphases are mine

⁴⁷ GILH 18

⁴⁸ Matthew 18:20; GILH 18.

⁴⁹ CC OFMCap(1990) n.45. It continues: For God, who has first loved us, speaks to us in many ways: in all creatures, in the signs of the times, in the lives of people, in our own heart, and especially through His Word in salvation history. As we respond to God speaking to us we achieve our fulfilment to the extent that we abandon our self-love and, in communion with God and man, pass over into Christ the God-man. Christ Himself is our life, our prayer and our work. Therefore we truly carry on a filial conversation with the Father when we live Christ and pray in His Spirit, who cries in our hearts: Abba, Father. Since we are consecrated more closely to the service of God by the profession of the gospel counsels, we should strive with freedom of spirit to pursue this life of prayer faithfully and constantly. Let us above all cultivate the spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things ought to be subservient, so that we may become true followers of Saint Francis, who was seen not so much as praying as having become a living prayer. Desiring above all the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation, and always praying to God with a pure heart, let us give to people a witness of genuine prayer, in such a way that all may see and perceive in us and in the life of our fraternities the goodness and kindness of God present in the world.

⁵⁰ Jn 12:46

⁵¹ Romans 8:26-27

⁵² Romans 5:5

⁵³ Cf John 17:26; Romans 8:14-17, etc.

⁵⁴ GILH 19. Bold emphases mine. This includes the Psalms, especially. Cf GILH 107-109

⁵⁵ GILH 20

⁵⁶ GI 15; cf SC 85

⁵⁷ Cf. Isaiah 5:1; Song of Songs 3:6, etc

⁵⁸ *Perfectae Caritatis* 7; *Evangelica Testificatio* n.8; *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life* n.26

⁵⁹ SC 83

⁶⁰ GILH 17

⁶¹ LG 46

⁶² *Universi qui Officium* in DOL n.3728

⁶³ *Ibid* DOL n.3729

⁶⁴ Cf *Catechism* n. 826

⁶⁵ GILH nn.10,35

⁶⁶ SC nn. 7,83-85

⁶⁷ CL nn. 3-5

⁶⁸ CL 3,6

⁶⁹ CL 7

⁷⁰ Cf CL 108

⁷¹ UQO in DOL n.3730

⁷² GILH 9,24-27

⁷³ SC 8; GILH 15-16.

⁷⁴ GILH 12

⁷⁵ GILH 71

⁷⁶ GILH 140-147

⁷⁷ cf DV 21,25; GILH 33,56.

⁷⁸ Dei Verbum 21

⁷⁹ *Ibid* n.25

⁸⁰ Cf GILH nns 140 and 29

⁸¹ UQO I,f. In DOL n.3731. Bold emphases mine.

⁸² SC 83-84,94

⁸³ GILH 10-11

⁸⁴ Cf GILH Lauds and Vespers 37-40; Office of Readings 55-57; Vigils 70-72; During the Day 74-77; Compline 84. Another attempt to describe the meaning of each of the hours has been done by DAVID STEINDL-RAST, *The Music of Silence*, Harper, San Francisco, 1995. See also, A.G. MARTIMORT "Structure and Spirituality of each Hour" in *The Church at Prayer* Vol 4 pp.256-272.

⁸⁵ Page 24

⁸⁶ GILH 70

⁸⁷ Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feast n.78

⁸⁸ UQO in DOL 3732

⁸⁹ GILH 72

⁹⁰ UQO in DOL 3730; cf GILH 72

⁹¹ cf 1 Cor 16:13; Col 4:2; 1 Thess 5:6; 1 Pet 5:8. See Catechism 2849, 672

⁹² *Catechism* 2612. On watchfulness (by Hesychios the Priest) in *Philokalia* Vol 1, pp. 162-198.

⁹³ At the Capuchin Hermitage Murrurundi

⁹⁴ It is also interesting to see how the practice of returning to bed after Vigils (which may be necessary sometimes) has been discredited as unpractical, if not harmful for an interesting variety of reasons (e.g. JOHN CASSIAN, *Institutes* (cf Book 2, chapters 1,13; Book 3, chapters 4,5. The *Rule of the Master* chapter 33, 10-26 joins nocturns with Matins so that brothers can return to rest until Prime if they wish. "Thus, rid entirely of drowsiness during these Hours and then fully restored, they may begin to work unencumbered after Prime, as we have shown by what was written about St. Helenus when it says: He used to take a rest after Matins. Indeed, should the brothers be forced to rise before cockcrow on the short nights (as in summer), still sluggish from sleep hardly begun, while in the first surge of the veins blood and humours are boiling through them and the organs, in the torpor of interrupted sleep, are digesting the food they have taken, the brothers would be not so much roused as killed when they start to get up in this heat of the unfinished cooking process. With head still heavy and belching from indigestion they put to flight the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and because distress afflicts their body, which sometimes seeks its own interests in this life even though it is in God's service, what is sweet for the sake of God will seem bitter, if not for all, at least for some."

⁹⁵ cf *Catechism* 2585-89; 2596-97

⁹⁶ Cf Acts and Hebrews especially ; Luke 24:44

⁹⁷ Cf DOM PIERRE SALMON *The Breviary Through the Centuries*, pp.42-61.

⁹⁸ Examples of these occur already in the LXX.

⁹⁹ Regarding the use of these things recommended by GILH, see nn. 111 (headings); 112 (Psalm collects); 113 (antiphons). Consequently, in the current *Liturgy of the Hours*, the Psalms often have a title and a Christian text (from the New Testament or one of the Fathers). The Title (in red) is meant to summarise the literal meaning of the psalm. The italicised text is intended as a Christian meaning for the psalm.. *In the new Liturgy of the Hours each psalm has two titles. One title sums up its literal meaning and its importance for the human life of the believer; the other consists of a phrase from the New Testament of the Fathers which helps the reader to pray the psalm according to its Christological meaning and, more*

generally, makes it easier to pray in the light of New Testament revelation. MARTIMORT, op.cit. P.203. Dom Salmon gives an historical overview of these traditional elements, op.cit. Pp.50-61.

¹⁰⁰ nn. 107-109

¹⁰¹ cf *Dei Verbum* 12; *Catechism* 115-119; 128-130

¹⁰² GILH 107

¹⁰³ On the principles of interpretation and authentic approaches to Scriptural Interpretation, cf *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, 15 April 1993.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Martimort, op.cit. pp. 204-205. He writes, According to Cassian, the monks of Egypt prayed silently for a few moments after each psalm, and then the monk whose function it was to end the prayer (qui orationem collecturus est, “who was to draw together or ‘collect’ the prayer”) spoke in the name of all [De institutis coenobiorum II,7,3]; this collect seems to have been spoken by a priest [II,10]. Egeria in turn noted that in Jerusalem each psalm or canticle was followed by a prayer which was said by a priest or deacon, even when those parts of the office that were meant especially for the monazontes. The Council of Agde (560) prescribed that after the antiphons collects are said by the bishop or the priests [Can.30]. The Chaldean office has maintained the practice of beginning each section (marmyota) with a prayer that is a true Psalter collect; collections of similar prayers have been found in the ancient Syrian “Sacerdotalia”. Among the series of Latin psalm-prayers or psalter collects that have come down to us, the more important are those of the Spanish Liturgy (published by J.Pinell). The reform undertaken by Paul VI aimed at reviving this tradition. The General Instruction announced the ultimate publication of an appendix to the Liturgy of the Hours that would offer collects for each psalm. These would help persons pray them in a Christian way. The collects would be optional; if used, once the psalm was finished and a moment of silence had been observed, the collect would gather up the sentiments of all and round off the psalmody. Cf. GILH 112; UQO in DOL 3731, p.1139. See also footnote 87.

¹⁰⁵ Dom Salmon lists those Saints Hilary, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Prosper of Aquitaine, Arnobius the Younger and Cassiodorus, op.cit. pp. 44-48

¹⁰⁶ That unison of voice can easily be mitigated by all sorts of singularity or individualism of the voice. Particularity or individualism refers to efforts of an individual to stress his uniqueness among the others with his voice. His voice is not the cause of discord in the prayer of the assembly as much as his compulsion to exert his uniqueness is. Also, a sober tone of voice, while helping preserve focus, can avoid other forms of individualism, e.g. the imposition of a Shakespearian voice-over, or of the overly affected voice of a bed-time story or nursery rhyme. A deliberate, reflective pace of recitation allows the text to speak for itself and the heart to listen. Even if well intended, audibly imposing on the text and the other persons in the assembly my own feeling or sentiment with exaggerated inflection, compromises the assembly’s unison of voice and is distracting. The use of a sober voice does not require droning. The proclamation of the psalms is in itself quite emphatic.

¹⁰⁷ Cc OFMCap(1945) chap 3, n.52). The current Constitutions (1990) n.51, reads: In the Liturgy of the Hours we speak to God with our own words taken from the Scriptures and in his word God Himself meets us and speaks to us. So that the word of God may penetrate our hearts more deeply and form our whole life more effectively the Liturgy of the Hours should be living and active; it is praiseworthy to insert intervals of silence, which greatly contribute to an attentive and fruitful celebration. In imitation of Saint Francis (2 Cel 96-97; L Maj X,6; LP 95) who often expressed his feelings by chant and singing, the liturgy should be celebrated with song, as far as possible, at least on feast days.

The last sentence of this paragraph cites an expression used by Francis in his letter to the whole order. The same expression is found in the Rule of St. Benedict, as well as the *Exordium Magnum Cistenciensis*: “The brothers should be attentive not so much to the melody of the voice as to the harmony of the mind, so that the voice may be in accord with the mind, and the mind be in harmony with God”. Cf Ep.Ord 41-42 in *Francis and Clare* p.60. See there footnotes 10 and 11.

¹⁰⁸ In order to allow the Holy Spirit to be heard inwardly and to bind personal prayer more closely to the Word of God and the public prayer of the Church, prudently interspersed periods of silence are to be observed (see GILH 202) after each psalm, once the antiphon has been repeated, and after both the long and the short readings. UQO in DOL 3731,c.

¹⁰⁹ Pope John Paul II, excerpt from an address at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York, on 3 October 1970. As found in DOL 3745, p.1144.

¹¹⁰ *Staretz* (plural *startsi*). Literally an □elder□: a monk (sometimes a lay person) distinguished for his saintliness, long experience in the spiritual life, and special gift for guiding the souls of others. *The Art of Prayer*, p.10.

¹¹¹ *Flame in the Snow*, pp 145-146