

THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

by MaryLou Paculaba, ocds on the occasion of the Third Congress of the OCDS in Canada

**O Lord, hear my voice when I call;
have mercy and answer.**

Of You my heart has spoken: "Seek His face."

It is Your face, O Lord, that I seek; hide not Your face.

Psalm 27 taken from the Liturgy of the Hours, Evening Prayer for Wednesday of Week 1.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus had a great devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus. She loved to meditate on Veronica's veil for a long time and to share her reflections with her novice, Sr. Marie of the Trinity. St. Therese reminded her of the importance of the Holy countenance in contemplative life and told her that the sight of our Lord's divine face kindled in her soul a burning desire to imitate and resemble Him. This was St. Therese's constant prayer, "Make me resemble You, Jesus!"

As Discalced Secular Order Carmelites, "seeking the face of God" should be our burning desire because this is what we are called to do. This should be our response to the call for holiness and it is for this reason that wherever or whenever we pray, we have to bring this burning desire of seeking the face of God within us and we should pray with all our mind, heart and soul just as we should love with our whole mind, heart and soul.

Our Holy Mother, St. Teresa said, "Let your desire be to see God; your fear to lose Him; your grief to be separated from Him; your joy in whatsoever may take you to Him; thus you will live in profound peace."

The Liturgy of the Hours invites us all together to come before the Lord in prayer. No other form of prayer can adequately substitute for it. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours enable us to pray with Jesus through the Holy Spirit to God the Father. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church describes, "it is the very prayer which Christ Himself together with his Body addresses to the Father." It is the Church's prayer, an extension of the Sacrifice of the Mass. It helps us sanctify each moment of our day as we keep holy the day through constant prayer.

When we unite ourselves with Jesus in our prayer, it makes our prayer pleasing to the Father. Isn't this what we aspire, to please God, our Father? How do we do this? How do we pray and celebrate the Church's daily liturgy with greater understanding and deeper love? This is the aim of this Workshop on the Liturgy of the Hours and this is what we hope to gain after attending this Workshop. We shall reflect upon the teachings of our Carmelite doctors, St. Teresa of Jesus, St. John of the Cross and St. Therese of the Child Jesus as our teachers on this subject. They will guide us on how we will be able to pray the hours with the proper Carmelite spirit and to enter into this form of Divine Worship.

It will take us hours to properly go over all the 7 prayer Hours in detail: Office of the Readings (Matins), Morning Prayer (Lauds), Midday Prayer (Sext), Mid-afternoon Prayer (None), Evening Prayer (Vespers), and Night Prayer (Compline). So in this Workshop, for the purpose of achieving our aim and to pray it as Article 5* of our Rule states, we shall only discuss about Morning Prayer (Lauds), Evening Prayer (Vespers) and Night Prayer (Compline) because these are the prayer Hours that we pray daily.

Morning Prayer

Morning Prayer should be the first prayer of the day right after rising. Our first waking moments should be an offering of praise and thanksgiving to God. Morning Prayer is composed of a psalm, an Old Testament Cantic and a 2nd psalm.

The 1st psalm of Morning Prayer has been chosen because it is a suitable psalm to use as we start the day. For example: Psalm 92 of Saturday Morning Prayer Week II. "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to make music to Your name, O most High, to proclaim Your love in the morning..." As this psalm speaks about morning, naturally, it is appropriate to pray this particular one as the psalm for Morning Prayer. Sometimes the psalm chosen is a prayer of lament or yearning to remind us about how much we all need God and to start us off right as we begin the day to think about other people's needs as well. For example: Psalm 42, Monday Morning Prayer, Week II. "Like a deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for You, my God. My soul is thirsting for God, the God of my life; when can I enter and see the face of God?"

The 2nd psalm is called a keynote psalm because it is the one that emphasizes the theme of the prayer hour. This psalm is always a prayer of praise. Although in a sense, all the psalms are songs of praise, the 23 psalms chosen for the 2nd psalm really emphasizes on praise as their theme. For example: Psalm 150 Sunday Morning Prayer, Week IV, "Praise God in His holy place, praise Him in his mighty heavens. Praise Him for His powerful deeds, praise his surpassing greatness..."

Then comes the canticle. A Cantic from the Old Testament is chosen because at the beginning of the day, we also celebrate the beginnings of God's plan. If you observe closely, we see Canticles taken from Jeremiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Sirach, etc.

After the Old Testament Cantic is the Benedictus or the Cantic of Zechariah. This cantic reminds us that God should be blessed and praised because "He has remembered his promise of mercy to Abraham and his children forever." "Zechariah" literally means 'God has remembered.' When one prays the Benedictus, one feels a sense of belonging and of peace because God has indeed shown his faithfulness, mercy and love throughout the ages and He has also shown His faithfulness, mercy and love to you and to me. This is what makes this cantic so beautiful.

Evening Prayer

Evening Prayer (Vespers) sanctifies the closing hours of the day and is usually said in very late afternoon or early evening and its theme is the fullness of time when God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ. It focuses on our Lord Jesus Christ as he brings the Father's love to us.

Vespers is composed of 2 psalms and a New Testament cantic. Twelve of the psalms chosen are royal psalms and as its name implies, it focuses on the Kingship of Christ. Other Vesper psalms are the Great Halleluia psalms, (Hallel psalms 111-118 and 120-136). For example, Psalm 113, Sunday, Evening Prayer I, Week III. "Praise, O servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord! May the name of the Lord be blessed both now and for evermore! From the rising of the sun to its setting, praised be the name of the Lord!"

The canticles of Evening Prayer are taken from the New Testament and they speak to us about the blessings that have come to us in Christ Jesus. The canticles are taken from Colossians, Philipians, book of Revelation, etc.

The Cantic of Mary or Magnificat reminds us to "proclaim the greatness of the Lord and rejoice in God our Savior for He has looked with favor on us, His lowly servants."

Mary is our model in prayer and her Magnificat should also be our hymn of joy and gratitude for our Lord's goodness.

Night Prayer

Night Prayer or Compline is to be prayed as the last prayer of the day just before retiring. It sanctifies the final hour of day. It is the time for an examination of conscience and a time to prepare for sleep, a time to prepare for what awaits us the next day and most importantly, a time to prepare for death. This is the time when we seriously look back at what we have done and accomplished so far during the day or previous days, mistakes we have made, a word we should not have said or gossip we should not have been involved in, and we try to make resolutions to do better with God's help. The psalms of Night Prayer are psalms of trust and of lament. Example: Psalm 88, Friday, Night Prayer.

"Lord my God, I call for help by day; I cry at night before you. Let my prayer come into Your presence. O turn Your ear to my cry. For my soul is filled with evils; my life is on the brink of the grave."

St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians said, "Your attitude must be that of Christ," so in prayer as well, our attitude must be that of Christ and we can be certain that we will always pray in spirit and in truth. Every time we pray with all our heart in all humility and confidence, we grow closer to our Lord. St. Therese used to say, "Hold on tight to your confidence. It is impossible for God not to respond to that, because He always measures His gifts by how much confidence we have." So when we pray, our attitude should be that of trust and of confidence that we are heard and most of all, that we are loved very much by our Heavenly Father.

Finally, I would like to conclude this little introduction to the Liturgy of the Hours Workshop by repeating the advice that St. Therese gave regarding prayer. She said that "we should have a happy heart when we pray because Jesus loves a soul that is always smiling." She said, "as contemplatives, we should try and console Jesus so He will be able to rest His divine head upon ours." This is how we give him delight. This is how we give Him pleasure.

It is not enough to go about the motions of prayer and say, "I've done it, I've prayed Morning and Evening Prayer - I've fulfilled what I'm supposed to do for the day." It is not what we do and how long we do it, but how much love we put into it that counts. As St. Therese puts it, "Without love, all our deeds, even the most brilliant, count as nothing." And as our Holy Father St. John of the Cross said, "When evening comes, you will be examined in love. Learn to love as God desires to be loved and abandon your own ways of acting."

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\*Article 5 of our Rule of Life states that " The liturgical life, as a perennial participation in the Paschal Mystery, nourishes the Secular Carmelites in their daily commitment to follow Christ crucified and risen. It leads towards an ever more perfect union with God, by making the pains and joys of their life an offering of praise and glory to the Lord. The liturgical life of the Secular Carmelites expresses itself mainly through participation in the Eucharist and in the celebration of the Church's Divine Office. They will therefore, as far as possible, join in the celebration of daily Mass, and each day celebrate Morning and Evening Prayer (Lauds and Vespers) according to the Liturgy of the Hours; if possible, they will recite also Night Prayer (Compline) before retiring.