



Our Sacrifice of Praise The Liturgy of the Hours & Daily Ministry

On the day of our Ordination, each one of us makes a promise to “pray the Liturgy of the Hours daily for the Church and for the whole world.” There is likely no promise that is sometimes more difficult to live than this one. If we are being entirely honest, at times the Liturgy of the Hours can seem dry...and at times, it can seem to be more of a burden than a blessing.

“Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the entire community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise.

For he continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. She does this, not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by praying the divine office” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 83).

With these powerful words the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council altered the obligation to the Divine Office by lessening the requirements to make it more manageable for busy clergy. They also said a few things that help make the Liturgy of the Hours more meaningful.

The very first words remind us why any of us, do any of this in the first place: because of “Christ Jesus who is the high priest of the new and eternal covenant”. The entire life of the Church flows from *his* priestly power, which was manifested when he offered himself – as both priest and victim – on the altar of the Cross for the redemption of the world. The Eucharist is the face of that saving Paschal Mystery to the world, and in the sacrifice of the Mass, we have the unbloody

perpetuation of that sacrifice across time and history. Yet, that wondrous gift of the Eucharist – in which dwells the entire spiritual reality of the Church – does not subsist alone. Rather it is the Mass, and the Liturgy of the Hours, that together make up the public prayer of the Church.

In the Mass our earthly Liturgy is joined with that of the Church Triumphant in heaven. The heavenly liturgy is never ending, it is an eternity of prayer and praise resounding through the “halls of heaven”. The Liturgy of the Hours prayed throughout the world continues this ceaseless praise of the Church here on earth, as it is joined with the Church in heaven. Like the Jews in exile, we too who are in exile, raise our voice using the very same psalms of our ancestors, as we move through this world on our pilgrim journey home to our native heaven.

The Diaconate and the Liturgy of the Hours

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, reinstated the Office of Deacon as a permanent option, and described the office as people who are “strengthened by sacramental grace, in communion with the bishop and his group of priests they serve in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God” (*Lumen Gentium* 29). Notice what it says: the diaconate of the liturgy, [the diaconate] of the word, and of charity to the people of God. Deacons are ordained to serve the Liturgy. Not to serve *at* the Liturgy, but to *serve the Liturgy*. The Liturgy being the work of the people: the work of the entire Body of Christ, with Christ as its head.

When the Deacon prays the Liturgy of the Hours he/she is coming into communion with what lies at the very core of his/her identity as a Deacon! In the pages of the Divine Office we break open that word that a deacon serves, and the sacrifice of praise that is offered is one of the greatest acts of charity imaginable.

It is worthy to note that on the road to the Priesthood, a part of that formation experience is service as a Deacon. Before hands are imposed passing on the gift and mystery of the Priesthood, first a person must receive the charism of service. It is the foundation of the life of the Priest because if the Priest stands in the person of Christ that means that they too are called to be both priest and victim. That sacrifice is offered in charity and service. So before one can be a priest, they must be a deacon.

The Priesthood and the Liturgy of the Hours

Ordination to the Priesthood then is for the purpose of offering sacrifice. There are countless moments throughout the day that the Priest is asked to embrace his/her “victimhood”. The phone calls, the knocks at the door, the “do you have just a few minutes?” Even in a Church where celibacy is not required, the life of a Priest is lived in sacrifice when lived rightly. Christmas morning is not spent around a tree with a spouse and children, but rather around the Altar with our children in the Lord. Easter weekend is spent not taking the kids to Easter Egg hunts but rather running them! While other families are baking a ham and watching TV, we are unwinding from the last of a marathon of Liturgical commitments.

We sacrifice our attention, our time, and our energy; all things that could be devoted to our spouse, our family, or a hobby.

The life of a Priest is supposed to be a sacrifice.

At the final doxology of the Mass we conclude the Eucharistic Prayer by raising the paten and chalice, offering the holocaust to the Father saying: it is through, with, and in *him*, and in the unity of the Holy Spirit, that all glory and honor is yours! In that moment we should recall the words of Jesus, “when I am lifted up from the earth I will draw everyone to myself” (John 12:32). The three times in John’s Gospel when he references this “being lifted up” he is referring to the Cross, raised on Calvary’s hill. It is lifted again and again at the doxology of every Mass, offering to the Father the sacrifice of his only Son. On that paten is every phone call, door knock, pastoral counseling session, and lost holiday. On that paten is every hobby not indulged, every inclination not followed, every moment with your spouse, and perhaps entire relationships.

He draws everything to himself, and offers it to the Father on Calvary, and it is glorified on Easter morning. So too there on that paten is the Liturgy of the Hours: our sacrifice of praise.

Making the Liturgy of the Hours Relevant

What are some tangible ways, that the Divine Office can find more meaning? First of all, we offer those daily prayers with a spirit of sacrifice. We also open our hearts as best we can to the work the Spirit may do through that time spent in his presence.

In the intercessions of both Morning and Evening Prayer, we are offered a one line refrain for each petition. For example: *Come Lord Jesus*. Carry that refrain in your heart until you pray the next hour: *come, Lord Jesus!*

Throughout the work day: come, Lord Jesus!

When you open the aggravating email: come, Lord Jesus!

When you have to go to the boring meeting: come, Lord Jesus!

Whatever the refrain is that day, when you pray the Office let those couple of words sink into your heart, and make it your prayer throughout the rest of the day, in every situation, whenever your heart feels the call to prayer...or especially perhaps when it doesn’t. Likewise after Evening Prayer, may the refrain presented there be your prayer until you go to bed at night. What a wonderful way to contribute to that ceaseless hymn of praise to our God!

Time Savers

In this age of technology, there are apps out there that allow us to pray the Liturgy of the Hours anywhere, and anytime! We just hit “play”, and we hear either a community of sisters, or a cast of professional voices read us the psalms and prayers of the hour. This can be a convenient way to pray the hours, but we shouldn’t allow it to become the entirety of how we meet this commitment.

We all recall through the days of our formation when we would pray the Liturgy of the Hours in a community setting, and without a doubt, those experiences of LOH were more enjoyable than praying them alone. They were written to be prayed with others. The apps provide a digital community to pray with. We likewise should not allow ourselves to become dependent on the apps.

The Liturgy of the Hours is our sacrifice of praise, and there is without a doubt something different about sitting in front of an iPad, then opening a ritual book marked with ribbons, that you need to know how to rightly navigate. One of these anyone can do, the other can be done only by the person who rightly understands the sacrifice he/she is about to offer. When we pray the Liturgy of the Hours, our sacrifice of praise is a priestly one: for we are a priestly people by virtue of our Baptism! Rather than bread and wine, we offer to God our day – hour by hour. We offer him these gifts that he may transform them as he sees fit for his glory. Let's make certain that technology contributes to our growth in love with the Lord, and does not serve as a hindrance – without prudence it can easily do the latter.

The Virgin Mary and the Liturgy of the Hours

As with all things, we should turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is model and exemplar of the Church. John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Mater*, calls the Annunciation a “decisive moment” for the Blessed Mother in her pilgrim journey home to the Lord. In that moment she empties herself entirely to the will of the Father (*RM* 14). She who is the Immaculate Conception, in that moment freely chooses to embrace the vocation that God has laid out for her, and all the sacrifice that would go along with it. Her entire life becomes a ceaseless hymn of praise to the Lord. As in the Magnificat that we pray each night says, “my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.” These are not words that she recites merely for posterity, but rather they are her expressing that which she had discovered to be a reality in her own life. All the way to the Cross she empties herself so that Jesus can do his work.

She treasures the dreadful warning of Simeon in her heart, and the confusing answer of a 12 year old Jesus in the Temple. She willingly steps aside putting her own concerns on the back burner at Cana; “do whatever he tells you” she tells the waiter, knowing somewhere in her heart that the moment Jesus acts, her life with him will radically change. All of this emptying is formation for when she would stand at the foot of his cross – as together they empty themselves entirely: he for the redemption of the world, and her for all of us who would be redeemed, herself included.

Mary prayed the traditional prayers of her Jewish faith daily: those same psalms prayed by the Israelites in the desert, and by us today in the LOH. More than that, she lived the Liturgy of the Hours each day, as her public prayer in union with the sacrifice of the Cross.

May Mary be our guide and our intercessor in all things! May we be inspired by her discipleship, comforted by her motherhood, and honored to be members of the same royal family: a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people set apart!