

Pray the Liturgy of the Hours



Bishop Hying's Column

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The Liturgy of the Hours is the official prayer of the Church and serves as an enriching compliment to the daily Mass.

A compilation of psalms, Scripture, prayers, and writings of the saints, the Hours are divided into seven daily prayer times with morning and evening prayer as the pillars.

Priests, deacons, most Religious, and many lay faithful pray it on a daily basis and find its rhythm and cycle to be rich spiritual fruit.

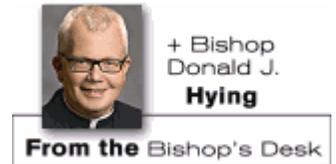
Having prayed it myself for almost 40 years, the psalms and readings have become comforting and holy companions on my path to God.

The principal occupation of cloistered monks and nuns is the chanting of the office; some communities pray all 150 psalms in choir every week.

Ever since the days of the early Church, Christians embraced the psalms as a sure mode of prayer and praise to God.

Composed for Jewish liturgical worship many years before Christ, the psalms are spiritual poetry, expressing every human emotion and experience in the light of God's presence and grace.

Christians pray them through a Christological lens, viewing them as expressions of Jesus' identity, mission, and even emotions before the Father.



Praying the psalms

The psalter embodies five fundamental types of psalms.

Psalms of joy and praise glorify God for His unfailing mercy and kindness.

The divine work of creation, the unfailing forgiveness of God, and His sustenance of human flourishing serve as principal themes, reminding us that our fundamental vocation on earth and in heaven is to praise and worship God.

Psalms of lament cry out the grief and suffering of a wounded heart, often asking where is God in the dark night.

Some of these psalms were written in the time of exile, when Israel suffered as slaves in a foreign land; others speak of physical and spiritual pain in the anguish of a crushed soul.

Tellingly, the psalms of lament consistently end with a reaffirmation of faith and trust in the providence and goodness of God.

The **royal psalms** speak of the power and majesty of God, manifested both in the glory of the Temple in Jerusalem and the person of Israel's earthly king.

Christians see here a foreshadowing of the kingship and reign of Jesus Christ whose sovereignty extends to every race, tribe, and tongue.

A recurrent theme is the ultimate union of all people gathered unto the Lord in Jerusalem, the seat of the mighty and divine king.

The **wisdom psalms** speak of the need for faith in God, a rejection of sin and the allurements of this world, the foolishness of envy, greed, and hatred, the brevity of this life, and a need to place all trust and confidence in God.

Psalms of thanksgiving speak of a heart overflowing with gratitude and love for the One who gives life, children, food, wealth, wisdom, forgiveness, and mercy in great abundance.

This stance of gratitude undergirds all of the psalms as our fundamental posture before the goodness of God.

Ritual formula

The Liturgy of the Hours is a ritual formula which calls one to prayer seven times a day.

The advantage of such a spiritual gift is that I do not need to reinvent the proverbial wheel every time I go to pray.

Prescribed psalms, readings, and prayers are laid out for me by the wisdom of the Church; I simply need to open the book and my heart to the presence of God.

Ritual sets us free to pray.

Conversely, the challenge of the Hours is that I can just slip into a spiritual rut, go through the motions, and not even think about what I am reading, absorbing, and praying.

How often I have read an entire page of something with my mind and heart elsewhere.

If asked what I had just read, I could not say.

As with all of life, the Liturgy of the Hours prayed well requires a vigilant heart and a focused mind.

In my limping efforts to pray the Liturgy of the Hours ever since I was 18 and brand new to the seminary, the psalms and readings have become spiritual friends.

Praying particular passages reminds me of past moments in my life when these holy words challenged, consoled, formed, and refashioned me.

The Hours remind me of the unfailing and mighty presence and mercy of God.

I have walked with these psalms and prayers most of my life. Lyrically expressive of every human emotion and experience, from joy and thanksgiving to sin and betrayal to hope and despair, the psalms remind us that the human heart has not changed since the beginning of time.

Whether or not we know it, we all long and yearn for God in our search for joy, meaning, love, and relationship.

We want to know that we are not alone, that our life matters and that we are loved. The psalms remind us that only in God will our soul find rest.

I encourage you, if you do not already, to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.

It can be confusing and even overwhelming at first, if you are using the printed book.

Thankfully, Liturgy of the Hours apps exist online, so you can pray it without much confusion or distraction.

Try praying it for a month; know that millions of fellow Catholics throughout the world are praying it with you.

May you find in this rich offering of Scripture and Tradition a spiritual feast to nourish you through the wilderness on the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Hours will not disappoint.
