



Praying the Liturgy of the Hours

Overview

The Liturgy of the Hours (LOH), often times referred to as the Breviary or the Divine Office, is the official daily prayer of the Catholic Church. Through it, the Church sanctifies the hours of the day by offering prayers of praise, thanksgiving, intercession, and contrition to God.

The LOH is biblical as it is composed primarily of the Psalms and readings from sacred scripture. It is Ecclesial as it is prayed in union with the whole Church. The rhythm of the LOH follows the natural order of the day from early morning to evening.

While clergy and religious are obligated to pray the LOH daily, the Church encourages the laity to participate according to their ability. In many monasteries, all seven of the hours listed below are prayed daily and often times in community. The requirements for diocesan priests include the Office of the Readings, Morning Prayer, one of the three Daytime Prayers, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer. Deacons are required to pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.

As Fishermen the goal is to begin developing a habit of prayer and that can differ depending upon each man and his routine. Adding morning prayer can more practical for some men, however that does not apply to all. As Fishermen we should dedicate ourselves to either praying Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer every day to begin with.

The principal Hours are:

Hour of the Day	Latin Name	English Name	Remarks
During the Night	Matins	Office of the Readings	Only available in 4-Part Set
Sunrise	Lauds	Morning Prayer	Begin with Invitatory
Third Hour of the Day 9:00 AM	Terce	Mid-morning Prayer	Priests are required to do one of these three every day.
Sixth Hour of the Day Noon	Sext	Midday Prayer	
Ninth Hour of the Day 3:00 PM	None	Mid-afternoon Prayer	
As evening approaches	Vespers	Evening Prayer	Saturday Evening is Sunday Evening Prayer I
Nightfall	Compline	Night Prayer	Right before bed – includes Examen Prayer



Historical Development

Praying with the Psalms was a common practice among Jewish people living during the time of Jesus. There were fixed times during the day when Psalms would be recited or sung at the temple in Jerusalem. The Apostles adopted this practice in the early Church as described in the Acts of the Apostles, “*Now Peter and John were going up to the temple area for the three o’clock hour of prayer.*” (Acts 3:1)

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Gospel spread throughout Europe through the establishment of monasteries. Within these monasteries practices of daily group prayer developed. In the sixth century Saint Benedict established the Benedictine Rule and garnered a following whose motto was *Ora et labora* - “Pray and Work” emphasizing a balanced life of spiritual devotion (prayer) and active, meaningful labor (work) as integral parts of serving God.

The establishment of the seven hours of prayer is often times attributed to the Benedictines and other religious orders of the time. Over the centuries this discipline of prayer became more standardized and was used almost exclusively by priests and religious. During those times, few lay people would have been capable of praying the LOH due to it being written in Latin and due to the lack of printed copies available.

The Second Vatican Council broadened participation by encouraging lay participation. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium* it states, “*Pastors of souls should see to it that the chief hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and the more solemn feasts. And the laity, too, are encouraged to recite the divine office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually.*” (Para 100)

Why Pray the Liturgy of the Hours?

To Pray with the Church: When we pray the LOH, we are praying with the whole Church. We unite ourselves with the Pope in Rome, with our local Bishop and with the Pastor of our parish. The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes it this way:

The Liturgy of the Hours is intended to become the prayer of the whole People of God. In it, Christ himself "continues his priestly work through his Church." His members participate according to their own place in the Church and the circumstances of their lives: priests devoted to the pastoral ministry, because they are called to remain diligent in prayer and the service of the word; religious, by the charism of their consecrated lives; all the faithful as much as possible: "Pastors of souls should see to it that the principal hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and on the more solemn feasts. The laity, too, are encouraged to recite the divine office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually." (CCC1175)

To Sanctify Time: Saint Paul called upon the Thessalonians to “*Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.*” (1 Thes 5:16-18). In the morning, we give praise and offer our day to the Lord. During the day we pray for perseverance and in the evening, we give thanks for the day passed. Before closing our eyes for the night, we ask for forgiveness of our sins and trusting in the Lord, rest in His peace. In this way, we pray without ceasing!

To be formed by Sacred Scripture: The Psalms shape the heart. The 150 Psalms, many of which were written by King David over 3000 years ago, contain the sentiment of every human heart. They teach us to



trust God under the direst circumstances and to give praise to Him with great hope. The Psalms give words to every human emotion and incline one's heart to prayer.

To Grow in Personal Holiness: The foundation of our spiritual life is a daily prayer life. It is by spending time with God in prayer that we encounter Him and become more like Him. We become holy!

A solid daily prayer requires discipline. In the same way that we cannot workout at the gym one day per week and expect to see results on our fitness meter, so it is with our spiritual life. In order to become more like God requires a disciplined prayer life. That means developing a daily prayer life and what better way to develop a daily prayer life than by aligning our prayers with the prayers of the Church on a daily basis and then watching it grow and develop from there.

Understanding the Different Books and Layout of Sections

Which Book? In recent years there have been a plethora of methods for accessing the LOH digitally. This is a wonderful tool for us to have to make praying the hours more accessible. As Fishermen we will be going *old school* and learning how to navigate through the paper version. While this can be a bit frustrating initially, there is great reward for those who persevere.

The LOH books come in three different varieties:

- Four Volume Breviary
- Christian Prayer
- Shorter Christian Prayer.

Fishermen utilize the Christian Prayer version as it contains everything we need to complete Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. The Four Volume Breviary contains everything in the Christian Prayer plus the Office of the Readings for each day along with the full versions of the Day Time prayers – hence the reason for four volumes. The Shorter Christian Prayer is not suitable for Fishermen as it does not include all of the necessary texts for Morning and Evening Prayer.

Sections: The Christian Prayer is broken down into five sections as listed below:

Title	Pages	Remarks
Proper of the Seasons	48-685	Advent/Christmas Ordinary Time Weeks 1-9 Lent/Easter Ordinary Time Weeks 7-34
Ordinary	685-699	Step by Step Instructions – How to Pray the LOH
Four Week Psalter	700-993	Four Weeks of Psalms (Psalmody) for each hour of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer
Proper of the Saints	1060-1353	Solemnities, Feasts, Memorials, & Optional Memorials
Commons	1355-1500	Used for some Holy Days
Hymns	1502-1587	As Needed



- **Proper of the Seasons:** This includes prayers and readings specific to the liturgical season (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter) and highlights the mysteries of Christ's life. It helps guide the faithful in aligning their prayers with the Church's calendar.
- **Ordinary:** This is the backbone and provides the structure and the rubrics of the LOH. It helps you to navigate each of the hours of prayer.
- **Psalter:** The core of the LOH is the 4-week cycle of the Psalter – running from Sunday Week 1 through Saturday Week 4. The Psalter is found in the middle of each volume, dividing the “Proper of the Seasons” in the front, from the “Proper of the Saints” and “Commons” in the back.
- **Proper of the Saints:** Contains the specific readings, antiphons, and prayers for the feast days and memorials of saints.
- **Commons:** Contains prayers (Psalms, Readings, Hymns,) for groups of saints (like Apostles, Martyrs, Doctors) that share common themes, rather than specific saints. The Commons section is used alongside the Proper of the Saints to supply the necessary hymns, readings, and prayers for saints' feast days that do not have their own unique texts in the Proper of Saints section.

How to Pray the Liturgy of the Hours

Prayer comes in many different styles from formal liturgies and devotions to simply having a conversation with God. When we pray there are certain practices that we can employ in order to obtain fruit from our time spent with God. It all begins with our inner disposition or the quieting of the soul. Finding a place where we can focus on our prayer without being distracted by cell phones, televisions, or loving family members.

The length of time required is dependent upon your experience level with the LOH. In other words, the more experience you have, the less time it takes to navigate through the book. For an experienced person, praying Morning Prayer takes about 12 minutes and Evening Prayer about 10 minutes. If you are just starting it may take double or triple that time initially. Pray slowly and attentively; do not rush!

The Sign of the Cross is performed as follows:

- Invitatory. At the words: *Lord, open my lips* – make the sign of the cross with right thumb on the lips.
- Opening Antiphon (unless preceded by the Invitatory). At the words: *God, come to my assistance...*
- Gospel Canticles (Morning and Evening Prayer). Made on first verse of the Canticle (*Blessed be the Lord ...*, or, *My soul proclaims the greatness Lord ...*).
- Dismissal. Either when the blessing is given by a priest or deacon, or, when lead by a lay person, at the words: *May the Lord bless us...*

Note: At the end of the Psalms and Gospel Canticles – Glory is given to God through the following words: “*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever.*” It is not uncommon for one to struggle with this prayer initially as we are accustomed to the words of the Glory Be. One should strive to overcome this tendency.



Bows: The liturgical bow for the Names of the Persons of the Trinity (an incline of the upper body of about 30 degrees) is given throughout the Liturgy of the Hours when called for (Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit ...).

Postures: While there can be variations, the general pattern is:

- Stand - Invitatory or Opening Antiphon and Hymn
- Sit - Psalmody, Reading, Responsory
- Stand - After the Responsory until the end

Structure of the Prayers: As Fishermen our primary focus will be on the “hinges” of the LOH: Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. The table below provides the structure for both. They are very similar in content with the exception of the Invitatory Prayer which is offered at the beginning of Morning Prayer only. The tables below provide a practical reference for navigating through the different sections of the Christian Prayer for the celebration of feasts and memorials. Use this to set your ribbons to the correct pages before you begin praying.

Planner for Feasts and Memorials

<i>Prayer Part</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Instructions</i>
Invitatory Prayer <i>*Morning Prayer Only</i>	Find Antiphon in either Proper of the Saints or the Commons.	Use Antiphon with Psalm 95 located in the Ordinary or on Card #1
Hymn	Use hymn that is provided or find hymn in the back of the book.	Find Hymn (#) in either Proper of the Saints or the Commons.
Psalmody	Use Psalmody from the Proper of the Saints (if provided) or the Psalter.	Psalmody from Sunday Week 1 in the Psalter is used typically or Card #2.
Readings and Responsorial	Readings/Responsorial from Proper of the Saints (if provided) or Commons.	
Canticle	Find Antiphon in either Proper of the Saints or the Commons.	Use Antiphon with Canticle of Zecharia located in the Ordinary or Card #1.
Intercessions	Use intercessions from Proper of the Saints (if given) or the Commons.	
Our Father		
Closing Prayer	Use closing prayer from the Proper of the Saints or as directed.	



As a Fishermen, it is vitally important to develop a daily prayer life and LOH provides us with the framework to do that. Learning the ropes of the LOH is not easy, but requires faithful repetition, patience, and trust. Even praying one Hour a day unites you to the ceaseless prayer of the Church and sanctifies your life in Christ.

Through the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church sanctifies the whole course of the day and night. CCC 1174.