

***Laudis canticum* – Pope Paul VI – November 1, 1970**

Apostolic Constitution promulgating the revised book of the Liturgy of the Hours

The hymn of praise that is sung through all the ages in the heavenly places and was brought by the High Priest, Christ Jesus, into this land of exile has been continued by the Church with constant fidelity over many centuries, in a rich variety of forms.

The liturgy of the hours gradually developed into the prayer of the local Church, a prayer offered at regular intervals and in appointed places under the presidency of a priest. It was seen as a kind of necessary complement by which the fullness of divine worship contained in the eucharistic sacrifice would overflow to reach all the hours of daily life.

The book of the divine office, gradually enlarged by many additions in the course of time, became a suitable instrument for the sacred service for which it was designed. Since over the generations a good many changes were introduced in the form of celebration, including the practice of individual recitation, it is not strange that the breviary, as it was sometimes called, underwent many transformations, sometimes affecting the principles of its arrangement.

The Council of Trent, unable, because of shortness of time, to complete the reform of the breviary, left this matter to the Apostolic See. The *Roman Breviary*, promulgated in 1568 by our predecessor St. Pius V, achieved above all what was so urgently needed, the introduction of uniformity in the canonical prayer of the Latin Church, after this uniformity had lapsed.

In subsequent centuries many revisions were made by Sixtus V, Clement VIII, Urban VIII, Clement XI, and other popes.

In 1911 St. Pius X promulgated a new breviary, prepared at his command. The ancient custom was restored of reciting the 150 psalms each week and the arrangement of the psalter was entirely revised to remove all repetitions and to harmonize the weekday psalter and the cycle of biblical readings with the offices of saints. In addition, the office of Sunday was raised in rank and dignity to take general precedence over feasts of saints.

The whole work of liturgical revision was undertaken again by Pius XII. For both private and public recitation of the office he permitted the use of the new translation of the psalter prepared by the Pontifical Biblical Institute and in 1947 established a special commission with the responsibility of studying the question of the breviary. In 1955 all the bishops throughout the world were questioned about this matter. The fruits of this labor and concern were first seen in the decree on the simplification of the rubrics, published 23 March 1955, and in the regulations for the breviary issued by John XXIII in the *Codex rubricarum* of 1960.

Though only a part of the liturgical reform came under his seal, Pope John XXIII was aware that the fundamental principles on which the liturgy rests required further study. He entrusted this task to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which in the meantime he had convoked. The result was that the Council treated the liturgy as a whole, and the hours in particular, with such thoroughness and skill, such spirituality and power, that there is scarcely a parallel to the Council's work in the entire history of the Church.

While Vatican Council II was still in session, it was our concern that after the promulgation of the Constitution on the Liturgy, its decrees should be put immediately into effect. For this purpose we established a special commission within the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy. With the help of scholars and specialists in the liturgical, theological, spiritual, and pastoral disciplines, the Consilium worked with the greatest zeal and diligence over a period of seven years to produce the new book for the liturgy of the hours.

The principles underlying it, its whole arrangement, as well as its individual parts were approved by the Consilium and also by the 1967 Synod of Bishops, after consultation with the bishops of the whole Church and a very large number of pastors, religious, and laity.

It will be helpful here, then, to set out in detail the underlying principles and the structure of the liturgy of the hours.

1. As required by the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, account was taken of the circumstances in which priests engaged in apostolic works find themselves today.

The office has been drawn up and arranged in such a way that not only clergy but also religious and indeed laity may participate in it, since it is the prayer of the whole people of God. People of different callings and circumstances, with their individual needs, were kept in mind and a variety of ways of celebrating the office has been provided, by means of which the prayer can be adapted to suit the way of life and vocation of different groups dedicated to the liturgy of the hours.

2. Since the liturgy of the hours is the means of sanctifying the day, the order of this prayer was revised so that in the circumstances of contemporary life the canonical hours could be more easily related to the chronological hours of the day.

For this reason the hour of prime was suppressed; morning prayer and evening prayer, as hinges of the entire office, were assigned the most important role and now have the character of true morning and evening prayer; the office of readings retains its character as a night office for those who celebrate it during the night, but it is suitable for any hour of the day; the daytime prayer is so arranged that those who choose only one of the hours for midmorning, midday, and midafternoon may say the one most suitable to the actual time of day, without losing any part of the four-week psalter.

3. To ensure that in celebrating the office mind and voice may be more easily in harmony and that the liturgy of the hours may become in reality “a source of devotion and nourishment for personal prayer,”[1] in the new book, the amount of obligatory daily prayer has been considerably reduced, but variety in the texts has been notably increased and many aids to meditation on the psalms provided, for example, the captions, antiphons, psalm-prayers, and optional periods of silence.

4. In accordance with the ruling by the Council,[2] the weekly cycle of the psalter has been replaced by an arrangement of the psalms over a period of four weeks, in the new version prepared by the Commission for the Neo-Vulgate edition of the Bible, which we ourselves established. In this new arrangement of the psalms a few of the psalms and verses that are somewhat harsh in tone have been omitted, especially because of the difficulties anticipated from their use in vernacular celebration. In addition, new canticles from the Old Testament have been added to morning prayer in order to increase its spiritual richness and canticles from the New Testament now enhance the beauty of evening prayer.

5. In the new cycle of readings from holy Scripture there is a more ample selection from the treasury of God's word, so planned as to harmonize with the cycle of readings at Mass.

The passages provide in general a certain unity of theme and have been chosen to present, in the course of the year, the principal stages in the history of salvation.

6. In accordance with the norms laid down by the Council, the daily reading the works of the Fathers and of ecclesiastical writers has been revised in such a way that the best of the writings of Christian authors, especially of the Fathers, is included. Besides this, an optional lectionary will be prepared with a fuller selection from the spiritual riches of these writers, as a source of even more abundant benefits.

7. Anything that is not in harmony with historical truth has been removed from the text of the liturgy of the hours. On this score, the readings, especially biographies of the saints, have been revised in such a way that, first and foremost, the spiritual portrait of the saints and their significance for the life of the Church emerge and are placed in their true context.

8. Intercessions (*preces*) have been added to morning prayer to express the consecration of the day and to offer prayer for the day's work about to begin. There is also a short act of supplication at evening prayer, drawn up in the form of general intercessions.

The Lord's Prayer has been restored to its position at the end of these prayers. Since the Lord's Prayer is also said at Mass, this change represents a return in our time to early Christian usage, namely, of saying this prayer three times in the day.

Now that the prayer of holy Church has been reformed and entirely revised in keeping with its very ancient tradition and in the light of the needs of our day, it is to be hoped above all that the liturgy of the hours may pervade and penetrate the whole of Christian prayer, giving it life, direction, and expression and effectively nourishing the spiritual life of the people of God.

We have, therefore, every confidence that an appreciation of the prayer "without ceasing"[3] that our Lord Jesus Christ commanded will take on new life. The book for the liturgy of the hours, distributed as it is according to seasons, continually strengthens and supports that prayer. The very celebration of the liturgy of the hours, especially when a community gathered for this purpose expresses the genuine nature of the praying Church and stands as a wonderful sign of that Church.

Christian prayer above all is the prayer of the whole human community, which Christ joins to himself.[4] Everyone shares in this prayer, which is proper to the one Body as it offers prayers that give expression to the voice of Christ's beloved Bride, to the hopes and desires of the whole Christian people, to supplications and petitions for the needs of all humanity.

This prayer takes its unity from the heart of Christ, for our Redeemer desired "that the life he had entered upon in his mortal body with supplications and with his sacrifice should continue without interruption through the ages in his Mystical Body, which is the Church." [5] Because of this, the prayer of the Church is at the same time "the very prayer that Christ himself, together with his Body, addresses to the Father." [6] As we celebrate the office, therefore, we must recognize our own voices echoing in Christ, his voice echoing in us.[7]

To manifest this quality of our prayer more clearly, "the warm and living love for holy Scripture"[8] that permeates the liturgy of the hours must come to life in all of us, so that Scripture may indeed become the chief source of all Christian prayer. In particular, the praying of the psalms, which continually ponders and proclaims the action of God in the history of salvation, must be grasped with new warmth by the people of God. This will be achieved more readily if a deeper understanding of the psalms, in the meaning in which they are used in the liturgy, is more diligently promoted among the clergy and communicated to all the faithful by means of appropriate catechesis. The wider range of Scripture readings provided not only in the Mass but also in the new liturgy of the hours will enable the history of salvation to be constantly recalled and its continuation in the life of the human race to be effectively proclaimed.

The life of Christ in his Mystical Body also perfects and elevates the personal life of each member of the faithful. Any conflict therefore between the prayer of the Church and personal prayer must be entirely excluded; rather the relationship between them must be strengthened and enlarged. Mental prayer should draw unflinching nourishment from readings, psalms, and the other parts of the liturgy of the hours. The recitation of the office should be adapted, as far as possible, to the needs of living and personal prayer, so that as the General Instruction provides, rhythms and melodies are used and forms of celebration chosen that are more suited to the spiritual needs of those who pray it. If the prayer of the divine office becomes genuine personal prayer, the relation between the liturgy and the whole Christian life also becomes clearer. The whole life of the faithful, hour by hour during day and night, is a kind of *leitourgia* or public service, in which the faithful give themselves over to the ministry of love toward God and

neighbor, identifying themselves with the action of Christ, who by his life and self-offering sanctified the life of all humanity.

The liturgy of the hours clearly expresses and effectively strengthens this sublime truth, embodied in the Christian life.

For this reason the hours are recommended to all Christ's faithful members, including those who are not bound by law to their recitation.

Those who have received from the Church the mandate to celebrate the liturgy of the hours are to complete its entire course faithfully each day, respecting as far as possible the actual time of day; first and foremost, they are to give due importance to morning and evening prayer.

Those who are in holy orders and are marked in a special way with the sign of Christ the Priest, as well as those consecrated in a particular way to the service of God and of the Church by the vows of religious profession, should not only be moved to celebrate the hours through obedience to law, but should also feel themselves drawn to them because of the intrinsic excellence of the hours and their pastoral and ascetical value. It is extremely desirable that the public prayer of the Church be offered by all from hearts renewed, in acknowledgment of the inherent need within the whole Body of the Church: as the image of its Head, the Church must be described as the praying Church.

May the praise of God resound in the Church of our day with greater grandeur and beauty by means of the new book for the liturgy of the hours, which now by Apostolic authority we sanction, approve, and promulgate. May it join the praise sung by saints and angels in the court of heaven. May it go from strength to strength in the days of this earthly exile and soon attain the fullness of praise that throughout eternity will be given "to the One who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb."^[9]

We decree that this new book for the liturgy of the hours may be put into use as soon as it is published. Meanwhile, the conferences of bishops are to see to the preparation of editions of this liturgical work in the vernacular and, after approval, that is, confirmation, of these editions by the Apostolic See, are to fix the date when the vernacular editions may or must be used, either in whole or in part. Beginning on the effective date for use of these versions in vernacular celebrations, only the revised form of the liturgy of the hours is to be followed, even by those who continue to use Latin.

For those however who, because of advanced age or for special reasons, experience serious difficulties in observing the new rite it is lawful to continue to use the former Roman Breviary, in whole or in part, with the consent of their Ordinary, and exclusively in individual recitation.

We wish that these decrees and prescriptions be firm and effective now and in the future, notwithstanding, to the extent necessary, apostolic constitutions and ordinances issued by our predecessors, and other prescriptions, even those deserving explicit mention and amendment.

Endnotes

1. SC art. 90.
2. SC art. 91.
3. See Luke 18:1 and 21:36; 1 Thess 5:17; Eph 6:18.
4. See SC art. 83.
5. Pius XII, Encycl. *Mediator Dei*, Nov. 1947, no. 2: AAS 39(1947) 522.
6. SC art. 84.
7. See Augustine, *Enarrat. in Ps. 85*, 1: CCL 39, 1176.
8. SC art. 24.
9. Rev 5:13.