

Faith in Five – Adults The Liturgy of the Hours



1. **The Liturgy of the Hours**, is known as the official prayer of the Universal Church, comprised of psalms, canticles, and passages from Scriptures. It is an ancient prayer of the Church, and ranks in importance second only to the Mass. “The Liturgy of the Hours, also known as **the Divine Office** or the Work of God (Opus Dei), is the daily prayer of the Church, marking the hours of each day and sanctifying the day with prayer. The Hours are a meditative dialogue on the mystery of Christ, using scripture and prayer. At times the dialogue is between the Church or individual soul and God; at times it is a dialogue among the members of the Church; and at times it is even between the Church and the world” ([Source](#)).

Public and common prayer by the people of God is rightly considered to be among the primary duties of the Church. From the very beginning those who were baptized “devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the community, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The divine office or the daily debt owed to God were public prayers offered day and night.

2. **Why is it called Liturgy of the Hours?** It is liturgy because it is a public prayer of the Church. Hours signifies the time of day the prayers are said. “That the day may be truly sanctified, and that the hours themselves may be recited with spiritual advantage, it is best that each of them be prayed at a time which most closely corresponds with its true canonical time, however The General Instruction on the Divine Office takes very great care not to specify a set time. There is nothing magical about the clock”. (From Universalis- The structure of the liturgy) ([Source](#)).
3. The Hours were based on the Jewish custom of praying at set hours. It was part of the daily lives of the apostles. In Psalm 119:164, “Seven times do I praise thee for thy righteous ordinances”; in the 5th century, St. Benedict added midnight prayers. In medieval times, consistent prayer was part of daily life. All 150 psalms were prayed over a week or two-week cycle. The Liturgy of the Hours was prayed eight times a day, every three hours. The Second Vatican Council simplified this to Morning, Midday, Evening and Night prayers. The prayers include psalms, hymns, readings from the Bible, the Canticle of Mary, and the Canticle of Zechariah.
4. **The following is from the presentation Liturgy of the Hours, by Diane Yale-Peabody. This is a description of how the hours were prayed in medieval times.**
Matins: Midnight: in darkness and silence, meditating on salvation as those who await the bridegroom. Also called Night office or Vigils.
Lauds (short for Laudatory): 3 AM. Celebrating daybreak, the symbol of the Resurrection. Pray the new day and God’s creation. A joyful, optimistic hour.
Prime: 6 AM Begin the day’s work. Prayers and work offered up to the greater honor and glory of God.

Terce ('third hour'): 9 AM. Prayer for strength to complete daily work. Dedicated to the Holy Spirit who came to the apostles at mid-morning.

Sext ('sixth hour'): 12 noon. Hot and weary monks pray that temptation and demands do not overcome them. Christ was crucified at noon.

None ('the ninth hour'): 3 pm. Pray for strength to continue work and meet the demands and responsibilities of life.

Vespers: 6 PM. Golden hour when lamps were lit, and the day's work was over. Pray and rest in thanksgiving and humility after the struggles, successes, and failures of a productive day.

Compline (Latin for dark coming): 9 PM. The last prayer before sleep, looking forward to God's mercy at the end of life.

5. Why the Liturgy of the Hours?
 - a. Christ gives us a commandment to pray, asking and seeking in His name.
 - b. Prayer to God is linked with Christ, we are raised to God and united with Him.
 - c. It involves the Holy Spirit, which unites the Church and leads us to the Father
 - d. It is a community prayer, with harmony of mind and voice, we worship and offer intercessions.
 - e. It consecrates time and sanctifies the whole day. We begin in the morning to praise God; throughout the day for His strength; in the evening with thanksgiving for blessings; and at night that God remains with us through darkness and into a new day.
 - f. We pray together through Christ, in Christ and with Christ. It praises God!
6. According to the USCCB, the [five hours of the Divine Office](#) are:
 - a. **Office of Readings** – the longest hours, featuring lengthy readings from the Bible, Church Fathers, or other saints prayed at any point during the day.
 - b. **Morning Prayer** – generally said at sunrise, but more commonly between 0500-0900
 - c. **Daytime Prayer**
 - d. **Evening Prayer** – said at time of sunset, between 4 pm-6 pm or later
 - e. **Night Prayer** – said before going to bed (generally 7 pm-9 pm, anytime prior to going to bed or even after midnight).
7. Clergy and religious are required to pray the five major Hours each day, with permanent deacons obligated to pray morning and evening prayer. The Second Vatican Council highly encourages the laity to “recite the divine office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually” (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 100). Even families, according to Pope St. Paul VI, are encouraged to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.
8. **Christian Prayer** is a one-volume book that contains: Morning, Evening and Night Prayer, with an abbreviated section for the Office of Readings and Daytime Prayer. It is designed for the everyday lay person who wants to deepen their prayer life by immersing themselves in the Psalms. Christian Prayer does not have the Office of Readings (comprised of three Psalms and two substantive readings) for each day.

9. The [rule of our faith](#) is measured by the law of our worship. Sacred liturgy is tied into Christian worship and sanctification. In liturgy, we adore God; with public worship and prayer, we “affect all humanity and contribute significantly to the salvation of the world”.
10. “For those who are new to praying the Divine Office, here are a [few helpful tips](#) to ensure your success:
 - a. Start simple. Choose one of the hours and aim for consistency in praying this hour. For example, pray Lauds (Morning Prayer) every day for a month before attempting to add another hour.
 - b. Don’t begin by praying all the hours at once, or by picking an hour that is impractical for your schedule.
 - c. If things are going well and you would like to do more, add Vespers (Evening Prayer) to your daily routine. Continue to pray both Lauds and Vespers for an additional month. This may be enough for you, but, if you would like to add more, pray the Office of Readings and/or Compline as well.
 - d. The important thing is to develop a prayer habit that you can maintain while still attending to the duties of your state in life”.
 - e. There are YouTube videos, mobile phone apps designed to help you pray the Office. Take the time to review or use them to guide you in prayer.

For further study:

[A Guide to using the Shorter Christian Prayer Book for praying the LOH](#)

[The Word on Fire Liturgy of the Hours](#): monthly subscription booklet for purchase

YouTube site: [Sing the Hours](#) : daily morning and evening prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours sung by Paul Rose.

[Source of Liturgy of the Hours apps for your phone or tablet](#)

[General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours](#)

**But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit
(Jude 1:20)**

This is a free resource! For more information, visit www.acatholicmomslife.com