

NOTES FOR THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS.

- This is also known as the Breviary or the Divine Office.
- Consider how our prayer life has developed or has it since our childhood?

A bit of background.

The early Christians would have gathered in the morning and evening for prayer and praise and recited psalms and scripture in a recurring cycle. By tradition the Book of Psalms is considered an essential ingredient of the Liturgy of the Hours as psalms had an honoured place in Jewish piety.

By the 3rd century Christians prayed at 9am, 12 noon, 3pm, 12pm, at cock crow, plus morning and evening prayers – in all 7 times. These times are relevant in Our Lord's passion and are rooted in the Paschal Mystery. Today in most monasteries they still pray 7 times.

The morning and evening prayers, sometimes referred to Lauds and Vespers, are considered the most important. The psalms are often sung when in community.

After the first centuries of Christianity the recitation of the Psalms and scripture passages from the Divine office would have been left to the professionals - the clergy, monks and nuns. By the 12th century the Divine Office would have been said only in Latin.

The Second Vatican Council looked to renew the emphasis on the whole People of God and encourage more laity to find spiritual nourishment from the official Morning and Evening prayer of the Church. The Liturgy of the Hours is the public prayer of the Church and is intended to be the prayer of the whole church and laity are encouraged to recite the Liturgy with priests, in a group or even individually. Remember even if you are praying it individually, there are thousands of people doing the same at the same time 24 hours per day.

Many of the changes made by Vatican II regarding the Liturgy of the Hours are contained within the Council's first conciliar document Sacrosanctum Concilium – The Sacred Liturgy, in December 1963 - and we also read in the Catechism CCC 1178, that this part of our Liturgy is like an extension to the Eucharistic celebration. Perhaps the biggest changes were to simplify the Liturgy of Hours and permit the use of the vernacular.

Structure.

I will highlight the structure of the morning and evening prayers as these are considered to be the hinges of the Daily Office

The full Liturgy of the hours is contained within 3 books. There is a shortened version which is useful to take on holiday etc as well as a larger daily version which contains most of the Liturgical Feast days. The prayers rotate around a four week cycle known as the Psalter, and there are a number of alternative prayers and readings for certain liturgical days e.g. at Easter, Christmas etc as well as for feast days and saints Memoria or optional Memoria. You will be able to find where we are by looking up an appropriate internet site or by looking at the Ordo.

The Divine Office starts with a short introduction followed by a hymn. It is fair to say that the hymns contained within the books are limited and can be changed to suit the assembly.

Following the Hymn we have in the morning prayers a Psalm, then an Old Testament canticle and then a Psalm of Praise. In the evening we have two Psalms followed by a New Testament canticle. Before and after each of the Psalms there is a short antiphon which provides a focus for meditation.

We then have a short Scriptural passage followed by a short responsory.

Next in the morning we have the Benedictus, which is the canticle of Zachariah and in the evening the Magnificat, the canticle of Mary. Both are from Luke's Gospel.

The Liturgy of the Hours concludes with Intercessions for the needs of the world and the Church – then follows The Lord's prayer and the collect for the day. Where there is an ordained minister there would be a blessing.

It is normal in this group prayer to split into two, the first saying the first verse the second group the second verse and alternate thereafter. The psalms are not a race and should be said at a fairly slow pace.

The leader will recite the opening antiphon for each psalm followed by the first line. We stand for the introduction, the hymn and the first line of the opening psalm and then sit down until the Benedictus (or Magnificat) when we again stand.

Ideally in community a different person would read the scripture reading and another say the intercessions with everyone joining the responses. Again if there is an ordained minister in the congregation they would say the concluding prayer with a blessing.