THE DAILY BREAD

*The Acts of the Apostles*



# The Liturgy of the Hours

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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*The Everyday Apostle*

THE DAILY BREAD

*Prayer, Beyond Listening*

# The Liturgy of the Hours

*Praying With the Whole Church, All Day Long*

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*A Daily Bread Formation Book*

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INTRODUCTION

# The Prayer of the Church Herself

Right now, as you read this sentence, the Church is praying. Not a metaphor, not a pious generality, but a literal fact: at this moment, somewhere in the world, in a monastery or a rectory or a cathedral or on the phone of an ordinary layman on a train, the official prayer of the Catholic Church is being prayed, and it has not stopped, day or night, for many centuries. The sun never sets on it. As one time zone finishes Evening Prayer, another begins Morning Prayer, and the great river of the Church's daily prayer flows on around the globe without interruption, as it has flowed for the whole life of the Church and will flow until Christ returns.

This prayer has a name: the Liturgy of the Hours, also called the Divine Office or the Breviary. And here is the thing most Catholic men do not know: it is not only for priests and monks. It belongs to the whole Church, and the Church warmly invites the laity, the ordinary man in the ordinary world, to take it up and pray it. When you pray the Liturgy of the Hours, you are not saying a private devotion of your own composition. You are joining your voice to the official, public prayer of the entire Body of Christ, adding yourself to that unbroken river, praying not merely your own prayer but the prayer of the Church herself.

*Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules.* — Psalm 119:164

That verse, from the longest of the Psalms, is one of the roots of the practice. Seven times a day. The people of God have always understood that prayer was not meant to be confined to a single moment but to sanctify the whole span of the day, to mark its hours with the praise of God, so that the entire day becomes holy, offered, shot through with prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours is how the Church does this. It divides the day with prayer, so that a man does not simply pray in the morning and then go about a secular day, but returns to God at the hinges of the day, morning and evening and night, keeping the whole of it oriented toward him.

For many men, the Liturgy of the Hours seems impossibly complicated. They have picked up a breviary, been baffled by the ribbons and the page-flipping and the seasonal variations, and concluded it was above their heads, a prayer for the professionals. This is a great loss, and it rests on a misunderstanding, because the heart of the Liturgy of the Hours is simple, ancient, and entirely within the reach of any man willing to learn it. This book exists to remove the barrier. We will look at what the Liturgy of the Hours is and

where it came from. We will see how it is structured and what actually happens in it. We will demystify the practical business of praying it, including the technology that has made it easier than at any point in history. And we will make the case that this prayer, which sanctifies the hours and joins a man to the whole praying Church, is one of the great treasures of the faith, hidden in plain sight, waiting for ordinary men to claim it.

The aim is that you close this book able to pray at least Morning and Evening Prayer, and that you discover in the Liturgy of the Hours what generations of Christians have discovered: a way to make the whole day holy, prayed not alone but with the entire Church, in a river of praise that never stops.

A word about why this belongs in a formation library for ordinary working men, and not only monks. There is a temptation to think that the sanctification of the whole day through fixed prayer is a monastic luxury, possible only for men whose whole lives are ordered around the chapel bell. It is not. The Liturgy of the Hours was made for exactly the divided, demanding day that an ordinary man lives, precisely because that day most needs to be reclaimed for God. The monk in his cloister already lives in a world saturated with prayer; the layman in his office and his commute and his crowded evening does not, and so he, arguably more than the monk, needs the hinges of the day marked with prayer, needs the deliberate returns to God that keep the secular hours from swallowing him whole. The Liturgy of the Hours is not a prayer that requires a monastery. It is a prayer that brings a little of the monastery into a layman′s ordinary day, planting fixed points of return to God in the midst of a life that would otherwise pull him steadily away. It was made for you, in the world, more than for the monk already withdrawn from it.

CHAPTER ONE

# Sanctifying the Whole Day

*What the Liturgy of the Hours Is*

Begin with the purpose, because the purpose explains everything else. The Liturgy of the Hours exists to sanctify time, to make the whole day holy by marking its hours with prayer. Understand that, and the structure that first seems arbitrary reveals itself as deeply wise.

## The Problem of the Divided Day

Most men live a divided day. There is the religious part, prayer in the morning perhaps, Mass on Sunday, and then there is the long secular stretch, the work and the errands and

the ordinary hours, in which God is not particularly present. Prayer is a bracket at the edges of a day that is otherwise given over to the world. This division is exactly the problem the book on the ordinary life named: the idea that most of a man's hours are spiritually neutral, lived apart from God. The Liturgy of the Hours is a direct assault on that division. It refuses to let prayer be confined to a single moment. Instead, it plants prayer at intervals through the day, so that a man returns to God again and again, at morning, at midday, at evening, at night, and the whole day is bound together by these returns, sanctified, made holy, kept oriented toward God from waking to sleep.

*From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised.* — Psalm 113:3

## A Day Marked by Prayer

Picture what this does to a day. A man rises and prays Morning Prayer, offering the day to God at its beginning, before it is captured by its demands. He works. At midday, he pauses, briefly, for a short prayer that pulls him back to God in the middle of the busyness. He works again. As evening comes and the day's labor ends, he prays Evening Prayer, giving thanks for the day and turning his heart back to God as the light fades. And before sleep, he prays Night Prayer, the Church's gentle close of the day, handing himself over to God for the night. The day is no longer a secular expanse with prayer at the edges. It is a day held together by prayer, returned to God at each of its hinges, sanctified through and through. This is the genius of the Liturgy of the Hours: not more prayer crammed into an already full life, but prayer distributed through the day in a way that consecrates the whole of it.

## Not Private Prayer, But the Church's Prayer

There is one more thing to understand at the outset, because it changes the character of everything. The Liturgy of the Hours is liturgy, which means it is the public, official prayer of the Church, not a private devotion. When you pray it, even alone in your kitchen, you are not praying by yourself. You are praying the prayer of the whole Church, joining a chorus that spans the globe and the centuries. The Church regards this prayer as the voice of Christ himself, the head, praying with and through his Body, the members. So when you pray the Liturgy of the Hours, Christ is praying in you, and you are praying in him, and you are united with every other soul praying it anywhere in the world at that hour, and with the whole communion of saints who have prayed it across two thousand years. You are never alone in this prayer. That is its nature. It is the prayer of the Church herself, and when you take it up, you lend her your voice.

### The Voice of Christ

It is worth pressing deeper into this, because it is the most beautiful and least understood thing about the Liturgy of the Hours. The Church teaches that the Liturgy of the Hours is the prayer of Christ himself. Christ, the eternal High Priest, is always interceding before the Father, always praying, and his prayer continues on earth through his Body, the Church. When the Church prays the Office, it is Christ praying in his members, and his members praying in him, the whole Christ, head and body, addressing the Father with one voice. This means that when you pray Morning Prayer alone in your kitchen, something staggering is happening: your voice is taken up into the voice of Christ, your small prayer joined to his eternal prayer, so that it is no longer merely you praying but Christ praying in you. The Psalms you pray were prayed by Christ in his earthly life, and he prays them still through you now. This is why the Office is called the prayer of the Church and not merely prayer in the Church. It is the Bridegroom and the Bride praying together, Christ and his people, one voice lifted to the Father. When you understand this, the Liturgy of the Hours stops being a devotion you perform and becomes a mystery you enter, the ongoing prayer of Christ himself, into which you are invited to disappear.

## CHAPTER TWO

# An Ancient Rhythm

*Where the Hours Came From*

The Liturgy of the Hours is not a medieval invention or a monastic peculiarity. Its roots run back before the Church, into the prayer life of the people of Israel, and knowing its history helps you see that in praying it, you join something very old and very deep.

### The Jewish Roots

The Jewish people, from whom we received the faith, prayed at fixed times of day. The Psalms themselves testify to it: evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint, says one; seven times a day I praise you, says another. Devout Jews marked the day with prayer, at set hours, returning to God at appointed times rather than only when they felt like it. This was the world Jesus was formed in and the practice he knew. The first Christians, most of them Jews, carried this rhythm of fixed-hour prayer into the Church, adapting it around the new reality of Christ. The Acts of the Apostles shows the apostles going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, keeping the ancient rhythm even as they proclaimed the risen Lord. From the very beginning, then, the Church prayed at fixed hours, and the Liturgy of the Hours is the direct descendant of that original practice,

refined and developed across two thousand years but continuous with the prayer of the apostles and, behind them, of Israel.

*Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.* — Psalm 55:17

## The Monastic Flowering

As the centuries passed, it was in the monasteries that fixed-hour prayer reached its fullest development. The monks organized their entire lives around the Divine Office, gathering many times a day and through the night to chant the Psalms and pray, so that their communities became engines of ceaseless prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours rising from them without pause. The great monastic rules built the day around these hours of prayer, and the pattern that developed there, the major hours of morning and evening, the shorter hours through the day, the night prayer, became the framework of the Liturgy of the Hours as the whole Church would come to pray it. We owe the preservation and flowering of this prayer, as we owe so much, to the monks, who kept the river flowing across the centuries and handed it down to us.

## A Prayer That Never Stopped

There is something worth pausing over in the sheer continuity of this prayer. From the fixed-hour prayer of Israel, through the apostles keeping the hours in the temple, through the desert hermits and the great monasteries, through every century of the Church's life down to this morning, the Liturgy of the Hours has been prayed without a single day's interruption. Empires rose and fell, plagues came and went, the map of the world was redrawn many times over, and through all of it, every day, morning and evening, the Church prayed the Psalms at the appointed hours. The prayer you take up when you open your app to Morning Prayer is the same prayer, in substance, that was prayed in the catacombs, in the medieval abbeys, by the saints whose names you know and the countless faithful whose names you do not. You are not starting something new. You are joining something ancient and unbroken, a river of prayer that has been flowing for longer than any nation on earth has existed, and adding your voice to it for the span of your life. There is a deep steadiness in this, an antidote to the frantic novelty of the age. When everything around you is changing and dissolving, you can step each morning into a prayer that has not changed in its essence for two thousand years, and be steadied by it, joined to all who prayed it before you and all who will pray it after you are gone.

## Given Back to the People

For much of the Church's history, the full Liturgy of the Hours became so complex, and so bound up with the clergy and religious orders, that ordinary lay people largely lost access to it. It became, in practice, the prayer of priests and monks. But the Second Vatican Council, in its renewal of the Church's worship, deliberately reformed the Liturgy of the Hours and gave it back to the whole people of God. The Council simplified its structure, encouraged its celebration by the laity, and expressed the hope that ordinary Christians would take it up and pray it, especially Morning and Evening Prayer, which it called the two hinges of the daily office. The Liturgy of the Hours you can pray today is the fruit of that renewal: streamlined, accessible, and explicitly offered to you, the layman, as your prayer and not only the clergy's. What was once locked away in the choir stalls of monasteries is now, deliberately, placed back in the hands of the ordinary faithful. This book is an invitation to claim what the Church has already offered you.

CHAPTER THREE

# The Shape of the Hours

*What Actually Happens*

Now to the practical heart of it: what the Liturgy of the Hours actually consists of. Once you see the structure, the mystery dissolves, and you realize that the core is simple and repeatable, and that the complexity people fear is mostly just the machinery of following the calendar, which technology now handles for you.

## The Hours of the Day

The full Liturgy of the Hours consists of several distinct times of prayer spread through the day. You do not have to pray all of them; the Church invites the laity especially to the two principal hours. Here are the main ones.

**Office of Readings**, *A longer hour, prayable at any time, rich in Scripture and readings from the Fathers and saints. A deeper well for those who want it.*

**Morning Prayer (Lauds)**, *One of the two hinges. Prayed on rising, it consecrates the day at its start with psalms of praise, a Gospel canticle, and intercessions.*

**Daytime Prayer**, *A short hour for the middle of the day (midmorning, midday, or midafternoon), a brief return to God in the midst of work.*

**Evening Prayer (Vespers)**, *The other hinge. Prayed as the day ends, it gives thanks for the day with psalms, the Canticle of Mary, and intercessions.*

**Night Prayer (Compline)**, *The Church's gentle close of the day, prayed before sleep. The simplest and most beloved hour, and the easiest place to begin.*

The two hinges, Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, are the ones the Church most wants the laity to pray, and they are where most men should focus. If a man prays only these two, he has taken up the essential rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours, consecrating the beginning and the end of each day with the prayer of the whole Church. Everything else is a rich addition for those who want more, but Morning and Evening Prayer are the heart.

## What Each Hour Contains

Each hour follows a consistent pattern, so that once you learn the shape of one, you can pray them all. An hour typically opens with a short introductory verse, a call to prayer. Then comes a hymn, setting the tone. Then the heart of the hour: the psalmody, usually two psalms and a canticle (a scriptural song), which are the core of the prayer, drawn from the same Psalter that has always been the backbone of the Church′s prayer. Then a short Scripture reading. Then, at the principal hours, a Gospel canticle: at Morning Prayer, the Canticle of Zechariah, the Benedictus; at Evening Prayer, the Canticle of Mary, the Magnificat. Then intercessions, prayers for the Church and the world. Then the Our Father. And then a concluding prayer and blessing. That is the shape. It is not complicated once you see it. It is the same skeleton every time, filled with different psalms and readings according to the day, and the Psalter is arranged so that over a set cycle you pray through a great range of the Psalms, praying them not in isolation but woven into this consistent, ancient structure.

## The Gospel Canticles

Two elements of the daily hours deserve special mention, because they are among the most beautiful features of the Office and they anchor the two hinges. Every morning, the Church prays the Canticle of Zechariah, the Benedictus, taken from the first chapter of Luke, the song the old priest Zechariah sang when his tongue was loosed at the birth of his son John the Baptist. It is a song about the dawning of salvation, about God visiting and redeeming his people, and it greets each new morning as another dawning of God′s tender mercy, the rising sun a daily sign of the light of Christ breaking on those who sat in darkness. And every evening, the Church prays the Canticle of Mary, the Magnificat, Mary′s own song from the same chapter of Luke, her great outpouring of praise when she visited Elizabeth: my soul magnifies the Lord. Think of what this means. Every single day of your life, if you pray the two hinges, you begin with the song of the dawn of salvation

and you end with the song of the Mother of God. Twice a day, the words of Scripture's own great canticles become your words. Over years, the Benedictus and the Magnificat become part of you, prayed so many times that they rise in you unbidden, the morning song and the evening song of a life lived in the rhythm of the Church.

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* — Luke 1:46-47

CHAPTER FOUR

# The Psalms at the Center

### *Why the Church Prays This Way*

At the core of every hour of the Liturgy of the Hours are the Psalms, and this is no accident. The Church builds her daily prayer on the Psalter because the Psalms are the prayers God himself gave, the inspired words that cover the whole range of human experience, prayed by Israel, prayed by Christ, and prayed by the Church ever since. If you have read the companion book in this library on praying the Psalms, you already understand their power. The Liturgy of the Hours is, in large part, the Church's structured way of praying the Psalms through, day after day, so that the whole Psalter passes through the mouth of the praying Church on a regular cycle.

## Praying the Whole Range

Here is one of the most important things to understand about praying the Psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours, and it can seem strange at first. You pray the psalms appointed for the day, not the ones that happen to match your mood. Some mornings you will pray a psalm of soaring joy on a day you feel flat, or a psalm of lament on a day you feel fine. This is deliberate, and it is one of the deep graces of the Office. Because you are not praying a private devotion but the prayer of the whole Church, you are never praying only for yourself. When you pray a psalm of joy you do not feel, you lend your voice to the countless members of the Body who are rejoicing. When you pray a lament on a good day, you carry the sorrowing members in your prayer. You are praying with and for the entire Church and the whole world, and so every psalm is fitting, because someone, somewhere in the Body, is living exactly what that psalm expresses, and you pray it for them. This frees a man from the tyranny of his own moods and lifts him into the vast prayer of the whole Church, where his single voice joins a chorus praying every human condition at once.

There is a discipline in this that forms a man in a particular and valuable way. Left to himself, a man prays mostly when he feels like it and mostly about what is on his own mind, which means his prayer tends to orbit his own concerns and to fade when his fervor fades. The Office breaks this pattern. It hands him words to pray that are not about his own concerns, at hours he may not feel like praying, and in doing so it lifts him out of the narrow circle of his own preoccupations into the vast concerns of the whole Church. He prays for persecuted Christians he will never meet, for the dying, for the Church's mission, for the whole world, in the intercessions and in the sweep of the Psalms. His prayer is stretched beyond himself. And this is a mercy, because a prayer life confined to a man's own concerns and moods is a small and fragile thing, while a prayer life joined to the Church's is vast and steady, carried by something larger than his own fervor. The Office teaches a man to pray beyond his feelings and beyond himself, and a man so taught is freed from the exhausting dependence on mood that wrecks so many private prayer lives.

*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.* — Romans 12:15

### Formed by the Psalter

There is also a slower grace at work. The man who prays the Liturgy of the Hours faithfully is praying through the Psalms constantly, cycling through them again and again, and over time the Psalms sink into him and become his own, as we saw in the book on praying the Psalms. But in the Office this happens almost automatically, carried by the structure, so that a man who keeps Morning and Evening Prayer finds, after a year or two, that the Psalms have taken up residence in him, that phrases rise unbidden at the right moments, that the language of the Psalter has become the native language of his soul. He did not set out to memorize them; the daily rhythm of the Office planted them in him. This is one of the quiet gifts of the Liturgy of the Hours: it immerses a man in the Psalms so thoroughly, and so effortlessly, that they become part of him, forming his prayer and his heart from the inside.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Two Hinges

### *Morning and Evening Prayer*

Since the Church most wants the laity to pray Morning and Evening Prayer, and since these are where most men should begin, let us look at each more closely, because they have a character and a purpose worth understanding.

## Morning Prayer: Consecrating the Day

Morning Prayer, traditionally called Lauds, from the Latin for praise, is prayed on rising, and its purpose is to consecrate the day to God at its very beginning, before the day is captured by its demands. This matters more than it might seem. The first orientation of the day tends to set its tone. The man who wakes and immediately reaches for his phone begins the day scattered, anxious, pulled outward into the world's noise before he is even fully awake. The man who wakes and prays Morning Prayer begins the day oriented toward God, offering the hours to come before they arrive, planting himself in praise before the demands descend. Morning Prayer is rich in psalms of praise, fitting for the dawn, and it includes the Canticle of Zechariah, the Benedictus, the song Zechariah sang at the birth of John the Baptist, which greets each new day as a fresh dawning of God's mercy. To pray Morning Prayer is to refuse to let the day begin on the world's terms, and to begin it instead on God's, consecrated, offered, oriented toward him from the first.

This is worth making concrete, because it names a battle every modern man fights whether he has named it or not. The first thing a man attends to in the morning shapes his interior state for hours. The man whose first act is to reach for his phone floods his still-waking mind with the world's noise, its demands, its outrage, its endless stream of things to react to, and he begins the day already scattered, already anxious, already pulled a dozen directions before his feet hit the floor. The Liturgy of the Hours offers a different first act. Morning Prayer, prayed before the phone, before the feed, before the news, plants a man in the presence of God and the words of the Psalms before the world gets its hooks in. It is a small act of resistance with large consequences, a daily choice about who gets the first word in your day, the world or God. Over time, the man who gives God the first word through Morning Prayer becomes a different man from the one who gives it to his phone, steadier, less reactive, more anchored, because the tone of his day is set by praise rather than by the anxious churn of the feed. If Morning Prayer did nothing else, this alone, reclaiming the first minutes of the day for God, would justify the practice. But of course it does much more.

*In the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.* — Psalm 5:3

## Evening Prayer: Giving Thanks for the Day

Evening Prayer, traditionally called Vespers, is prayed as the day ends and the light fades, and its purpose is to give thanks for the day and to turn the heart back to God as the labor ceases. Where Morning Prayer consecrates the day ahead, Evening Prayer gathers up the day behind, offering it back to God with thanksgiving, closing the day's work in prayer

rather than in mere exhaustion or distraction. It includes the Canticle of Mary, the Magnificat, Mary's great song of praise, which the Church sings every evening of the year, so that each day closes with the words of the Mother of God magnifying the Lord. There is something deeply right about ending the working day this way, pausing as the light goes to give thanks, to turn from the day's labor back to its Giver, to close the active hours with praise before the evening and the night. Morning and Evening Prayer together form a frame around the day, consecrating its start and offering its close, and a man who prays both has bound his whole day in the prayer of the Church.

### The Two Together

Praying both hinges is the ideal, and it is genuinely within reach: Morning and Evening Prayer each take roughly ten to fifteen minutes. Together they cost less than half an hour of a day, and they transform the day, consecrating its beginning and its end and, by framing it, sanctifying everything in between. A man who takes up these two hours has entered fully into the essential rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours, and has joined the whole Church in her daily consecration of time. If you take nothing else from this book, take these two hinges. Begin with one if two feels like too much at first, but aim for both, because together they frame the day in prayer, and a day so framed is a day given to God.

## CHAPTER SIX

# How to Actually Pray It

*Removing the Barriers*

The single greatest obstacle to the Liturgy of the Hours is not spiritual but practical: men find it confusing to navigate. The traditional printed breviary, with its multiple volumes, ribbons, and constant page-flipping to follow the calendar, genuinely is complicated to learn. But we live at the easiest moment in history to pray the Office, because technology has removed nearly all of the difficulty.

### The Apps Have Changed Everything

There are now apps and websites that assemble the entire Liturgy of the Hours for you, automatically, for the current day. You open the app, tap Morning Prayer, and everything is there, in order, on one screen: the right psalms for today, the right readings, the right canticles, all assembled according to the calendar without any page-flipping or ribbon-management on your part. What used to require skill in navigating a complex book now requires only the ability to read down a screen. This has made the Liturgy of the Hours

more accessible to ordinary laypeople than at any point in the Church's history. If the complexity of the printed breviary has intimidated you, set that aside. Download one of the widely used Liturgy of the Hours apps, and the machinery vanishes. You are left with only the prayer itself, assembled and ready, and all you have to do is pray it. This library can point you toward the current recommended resources, and the technology continues to improve; the point is simply that the practical barrier that stopped previous generations is, for you, essentially gone.

*Pray without ceasing.* — 1 Thessalonians 5:17

## Start Small

Do not try to pray all the hours at once. This is how men overwhelm themselves and quit. Start with one hour. For most men, the best place to begin is either Morning Prayer, which sets the day, or Night Prayer, which is the simplest and shortest of all the hours and follows a gentle, largely repeating pattern that quickly becomes familiar. Night Prayer in particular is a beautiful entry point: prayed before sleep, it is brief, calming, and easy to learn, and many men who begin there fall in love with the Office through it. Pray your one hour faithfully for a few weeks until it becomes natural, until you know its rhythm and it no longer requires effort to follow. Then, when you are ready, add a second, ideally the other hinge, so that you are praying both Morning and Evening Prayer. Grow into it gradually. The Liturgy of the Hours is not a mountain to be conquered in a day but a rhythm to be grown into over time, one hour at a time, until it becomes the natural architecture of your day.

It is worth describing Night Prayer, Compline, a little more, because it is where so many men first fall in love with the Office and because its character captures something of the whole. Night Prayer is the Church's gentle putting of the day to rest. It is short, following a largely repeating weekly pattern that quickly becomes familiar so that you soon barely need the text. It typically includes an examination of conscience at the start, a brief acknowledgment of the day's failures before sleep; a psalm or two of trust, often the ones about resting secure under the shadow of God's wings; a short reading; and then, at its close, one of the great treasures of the Office, the Canticle of Simeon, the Nunc Dimittis, the old man's words in the temple when he held the infant Christ: now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace. To pray these words each night, now you let your servant depart in peace, is to rehearse, gently, every night, the surrender that death will one day ask, handing yourself over to God for the night as you will one day hand yourself over to him at the end. And Night Prayer concludes with a final antiphon to Our Lady, one of the beautiful seasonal chants that place a man under his Mother's protection as he sleeps. There is nothing in the Christian life quite like the peace of ending each day this way, the

whole day surrendered, yourself placed in God's hands and Mary's care, sleep entered as a small trusting death from which you will rise. Many men who begin the Office with Night Prayer find they cannot imagine going to sleep any other way again.

### Alone or Together

The Liturgy of the Hours can be prayed alone, and most laymen pray it alone most of the time, and this is entirely good; even alone, you pray with the whole Church. But it is by nature a communal prayer, and it comes especially alive when prayed with others, its structure of verses and responses designed for more than one voice. A husband and wife can pray Morning or Evening Prayer together. A family can pray Night Prayer as a household. A men's group can open or close its gathering with an hour of the Office, and this is a natural fit for an Acts of the Apostles group, a way to root the men's time together in the prayer of the whole Church. If you can find even one other person to pray an hour with, do it, because the Liturgy of the Hours prayed in company reveals its communal nature in a way that solitary praying, good as it is, cannot fully show. But do not wait for company to begin. Pray it alone, and know that you are never truly alone in it.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# The Obstacles

*What Stops Men, and What to Do*

Even with the practical barrier lowered by technology, men encounter obstacles in taking up the Liturgy of the Hours. Naming them helps.

### It Feels Mechanical

Because the Liturgy of the Hours is structured and repetitive, praying set texts on a schedule rather than pouring out spontaneous prayer, some men find it feels mechanical, less authentic than praying in their own words. This objection rests on a misunderstanding of what liturgical prayer is and does. The structure is not a limitation but a strength. Spontaneous prayer, precious as it is, depends on how a man feels at the moment, and on the days he feels nothing, it dries up. Liturgical prayer does not depend on mood. It gives a man the words of the Church to pray whether he feels like it or not, and this is a mercy, because it carries him through the dry days when his own words would fail. Over time, moreover, the set texts stop feeling mechanical and begin to feel like home, the familiar words taking on depth through repetition, becoming worn and

trustworthy like a path walked many times. What feels mechanical at first becomes, with faithfulness, deeply personal, as the prayer of the Church becomes your own prayer. Do not judge the Office by the first weeks. Give the structure time to become home.

> *I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.* — Psalm 122:1

## Missing Hours and Falling Behind

Men who take up the Office often become discouraged when they miss hours, skip days, fall out of the rhythm, and then feel they have failed and give up entirely. Release yourself from this. The Liturgy of the Hours is a gift, not a burden of obligation laid on the laity; unlike clergy and religious, you are not bound to pray it, and missing an hour is not a sin or a failure. If you miss Morning Prayer, pray Evening Prayer. If you miss a whole day, begin again the next. The Office is prayed in the present; you do not need to make up what you missed. Simply return to it, today, wherever you are, and pray the hour at hand. The goal is a rhythm of prayer that sanctifies your days, not a perfect record, and a man who prays Morning and Evening Prayer most days, returning gently whenever he falls out of step, has received the whole gift the Office offers. Do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Miss, return, continue. That is the pattern of a real life of prayer.

## Not Feeling Anything

As with all prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours will sometimes feel dry, and a man may wonder whether it is doing anything when he feels nothing. Here the communal, liturgical nature of the Office is a particular comfort. Because you are praying the prayer of the whole Church, its fruitfulness does not depend on your feelings. You are offering the Church's praise to God, joining the unceasing prayer of the Body of Christ, and that offering is real and pleasing to God whether or not you feel anything at the time. The formation is happening beneath the level of feeling, as the Psalms and the rhythm work their way into you. Pray the Office faithfully through the dry stretches, trusting that you are participating in something larger than your own experience of it, the great prayer of the Church, which does not depend on your mood to be real. Faithfulness, not feeling, is the measure, here as in all prayer.

## It Takes Too Much Time

Some men hear about the Liturgy of the Hours and conclude they simply do not have time, picturing hours in a chapel they cannot spare. This rests on a misunderstanding of what the laity are invited to pray. Morning Prayer takes roughly ten to fifteen minutes. Evening Prayer, the same. Night Prayer is shorter still, often under ten. A man praying the two hinges gives perhaps twenty-five minutes across a whole day, less than he spends

scrolling his phone before he is even out of bed, less than a single television commercial break repeated a few times. The question is never really whether a man has twenty-five minutes in his day. He has them; the day is full of them, spent on far less. The question is whether he will give them to this. And the beauty of the Office is that the time it asks is not added dead weight but transformative: those twenty-five minutes, placed at the hinges of the day, sanctify all the hours between them, so that the small investment consecrates the whole. A man does not lack the time for the Liturgy of the Hours. He has only not yet decided to spend, on the prayer of the Church, minutes he currently spends on things that give him far less. Decide it, and the time is there.

CHAPTER EIGHT

# Praying It This Week

*The Practical Rule*

Enough understanding. The Liturgy of the Hours is meant to be prayed, and you know enough now to begin this week. Here is the practical shape of starting.

## This Week's Plan

First, get a good app or resource that assembles the Liturgy of the Hours for the current day, so the machinery is handled and you are left with only the prayer. Second, choose one hour to begin with, either Morning Prayer, to consecrate your day, or Night Prayer, the simplest and gentlest hour, prayed before sleep. Third, pray that one hour every day this week, at the same time, attached to a fixed anchor in your day so you do not forget: Morning Prayer on rising, before the phone; or Night Prayer in bed, as the last thing before sleep. Do not add anything else yet. Just pray your one hour, daily, until its rhythm becomes familiar and following it no longer takes effort. That is the whole assignment for the first week. One hour, every day, until it becomes natural.

*Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.* — Psalm 141:2

## Growing Into It

Once your first hour is established and natural, usually after a few weeks, add the other hinge, so that you are praying both Morning and Evening Prayer, framing your whole day in the prayer of the Church. For most laymen, this is the goal and the ideal resting place: the two hinges, faithfully prayed, consecrating the beginning and the end of each day.

Some men, drawn deeper, will add Daytime Prayer or the Office of Readings, and the Office is there for them, an inexhaustible well. But do not feel you must pray all the hours. The Church holds up Morning and Evening Prayer as the essential rhythm for the laity, and a man who prays these two has taken up the Liturgy of the Hours fully and well. Grow into it at your own pace, one hour at a time, and let it become, gradually, the architecture of your days.

### A Day Made Holy

Keep before you what you are actually doing when you pray the Office, because it is easy to lose sight of it in the mechanics. You are not merely adding prayers to your day. You are sanctifying time itself, marking the hinges of the day with the prayer of the whole Church, refusing to let any part of your day be merely secular, binding the whole of it to God. And you are doing this not alone but joined to the entire Body of Christ, adding your voice to the unceasing river of the Church′s prayer that circles the globe and never stops. Every time you pray an hour, you step into that river. The morning you consecrate is joined to every morning being consecrated around the world. The evening you offer is joined to every evening being offered. Your single voice becomes part of the great voice of the Church herself, praising God from the rising of the sun to its setting, as she has for two thousand years and will until Christ returns. That is what you take up when you pray the Liturgy of the Hours. It is worth taking up.

## CONCLUSION

# The River You Can Step Into

Return to where we began, to the fact that the Church is praying right now, at this very moment, and has never stopped. The Liturgy of the Hours is that unceasing prayer, the river of praise that flows around the globe without interruption, morning giving way to morning across the time zones, the whole Church lifting the Psalms to God in an unbroken voice, day and night, century after century. It has been flowing your whole life, whether you knew it or not, and it is flowing now.

What this book has tried to show you is that you can step into that river. It is not reserved for priests and monks. The Church has deliberately given it back to the ordinary faithful, simplified it, and made it, through the technology of our age, more accessible than it has ever been. The barrier that stopped previous generations, the baffling complexity of the printed breviary, is gone. What remains is only the prayer itself, waiting for you: the

Psalms of the whole Church, the consecration of the day at its hinges, the joining of your single voice to the vast and ceaseless praise of the Body of Christ.

Begin this week. Get the app, choose one hour, and pray it daily until it becomes natural, and then add the other hinge, until Morning and Evening Prayer frame your days. Do not worry about praying it perfectly or about missing hours; simply return, again and again, to the prayer of the Church, and let it slowly become the architecture of your life. In time you will find that your days are no longer a secular expanse with prayer at the edges but a whole sanctified by prayer, bound to God at every hinge, and that you are never praying alone, because you have joined the river that never stops.

The Church is praying, right now, as she always is. The Liturgy of the Hours is her voice, and it is waiting for yours. Step into the river. It has been flowing toward this moment your whole life, and it is, as always, ready to carry you.

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*The Liturgy of the Hours: Praying With the Whole Church, All Day Long is part of The Daily Bread Library.*