

## Introducing Young People to the Liturgy of the Hours

by Meg Dalmut

“God, Come to my assistance...” is the way most hours in the Liturgy of the Hours begin. This plea is the perfect way to begin prayer and is the way we should begin all prayers, by asking the Lord to intercede for us as we do not know how to pray as we ought. The Liturgy of the Hours is the prayer of the people of God and a way to sanctify all the hours of each day. As we read in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, “Christian prayer is above all the prayer of the whole human community, which Christ joins to Himself.”

The Liturgy of the Hours gets a bad rap as a confusing, complicated, dry way to pray. In this prayer, the same thing is prayed in four week cycles and words are simply read from a page. This is where youth ministers have an opportunity to bring an element of our Catholic Christian faith tradition alive. Break it down. If you look closely this prayer looks a whole lot like the Mass. It begins by reciting psalms; then we move to a reading usually from the New Testament and it has a Responsory (like a Responsorial Psalm); next is a Gospel Canticle in which God’s praises and His faithfulness are remembered; the Intercessions come next or the prayers of the people of God and they are concluded with the Our Father; finally there is a closing prayer and a blessing in which we ask for God’s protection and the inheritance of eternal life. This rhythm contains peace because it is so familiar. Oh the wisdom of the Church!

Young people should enjoy praying the psalms. They contain every human emotion that one can experience. At the beginning of the psalms, there is usually a short line in bold will explain the emotion that is being talked about in the psalm. For example, prayer for help against enemies, prayer to praise the Lord, prayer of a sick person, prayer of thanksgiving, prayer of faithfulness, prayer asking God to come to my aid, prayer of joyful hope, prayer when in distress David was the first singer- songwriter and our young people surely identify with that!

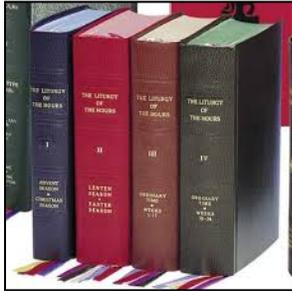


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A favorite element of the Liturgy of the Hours is the close tie to the Holy Family. When Jesus was born, families would pray the psalms together reciting them aloud. So as the Church prays together the psalms at the beginning of each hour in the Liturgy of the Hours, imagine Jesus, Mary, and Joseph doing the exact same thing in their home. Our Lord told us, “ask and it will be given to you...” Lk 11:9. Consequently, the intercessions are a beautiful moment in this prayer. Many communities pause at the end of these prayers for individuals to voice their own petitions aloud before the recitation of the Our Father. It is just another way to personalize this prayer. Lastly, the perfect prayer is prayed in the Our Father, the exact words that our Savior taught us.

An added benefit of praying this prayer is the ties it has to the liturgical calendar. Saints’ memorials, feasts, and solemnities are celebrated and they all have a biography so one can come to know more people who reside in the heavenly kingdom. Based on the level of the saints’ feast, the Liturgy is prayed a different way. This helps all to understand the importance of particular days in the Church calendar.

Lastly, like the Mass, at any moment during the day, one can be praying the exact same thing with thousands of others around the world. This prayer aids in understanding the universality of the Church. Our young people can begin to understand in a small way the part they play in prayer for the Church. They have the opportunity to say the same words as the Pope, as cloistered nuns, as their parish priest, as their youth ministers, as their teachers and mentors.



The best way to get our young people hooked on this kind of prayer is by introducing them to the final hour of the day, Night Prayer. It is the simplest of the five hours to pray. Every Monday the same prayer is said, every Tuesday the same prayer is said, etc. Whether or not it's a feast day, Night Prayer does not change. It's also the shortest hour of the day with an examination of conscience, one psalm, a reading, a gospel canticle, and a closing prayer. In all, it takes approximately five minutes. Begin praying this with young people on retreats, at the end of Sunday night gatherings, at small group meetings. It is a beautiful close to a day, examining all that has happened, praising God for His blessings, and commending our souls to the Lord for a safe sleep.

Begin by praying this prayer yourself, get into a rhythm and try to pray it in community. It is designed as a communal prayer and so when two or more are gathered, the prayer takes on a new life. Before you even open your book, get a "Guide to Liturgy of the Hours" from any Catholic book store. It will tell you exactly what pages you should be on each day. It comes in handy and only costs \$3.95!

Many saints have exclaimed that the way to holiness is by mastering the little things, doing the small tasks well, being in a routine. Liturgy of the Hours is a way to pray without ceasing and to call to mind the Lord's presence in all moments of the day. One is able to unite their heart to the Lord's and to intercede for the Church in Her daily apostolic life. "Lord, make haste to help me."

*Meg Dalmut has been serving as the Associate Director of Campus Ministry at Marymount University since 2005. She is also the Interim Director of the Women Youth Apostles, a community of women dedicated to serving young people in the Diocese of Arlington. Her daily joy is seeing young people experience God's abundant love and loving Him in return!*