

Evening Prayer at St. Eugene

Week Two: History and Structure of the Divine Office

“Seven times a day I praise you.” Psalm 119:164

History of the Liturgy of the Hours

- Mosaic Law prescribes prayer 3 times daily: Morning, Afternoon and Evening
- “Evening, morning, and afternoon do I pray and cry, and he will hear my voice.” Psalm 55
- Daniel 6:11 describes the prophet praying three times a day facing Jerusalem while exiled in Babylon.
- The Apostles and other early Christians practiced fixed-hour prayer. Acts 3:1; 10:9; and 10:30
- Practice was kept alive by desert hermits and the early monastic movement – Some praying all 150 Psalms each day!
- Saint Benedict (6th Century) created the “Divine Office”. Prayer every 3 hours around the clock- 8 times a day. (Included “Prime” at 3 AM – Removed by Vatican 2)
- Divine Office was the daily Liturgy in Middle Ages – daily Mass not universal.
- Lay persons would come to hear Liturgy chanted in monasteries or cathedrals.
- Giant-sized books were propped up for the entire choir to see. With the printing press, smaller books – Breviaries – were created.
- Lay involvement dwindled- Replaced by Rosary, or daily Mass.
- While clerics and religious may be *required* to do all or part of the Liturgy, lay persons are *encouraged* to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.

Structure of the Liturgy of the Hours

Invitatory (Not a separate prayer – To be said as an intro to whatever prayer you start with. One of four Psalms – Psalm 95 most commonly used. (Or 24, 67 or 100)

Morning Prayer (Lauds) Very similar to Evening Prayer. Canticle of Zechariah.

Daytime Prayer X 3 (mid-morning – Terce) (noon – Sext) (mid-afternoon – None)

These are shorter than morning or evening. Hymn, 3 Psalms, Short reading, Responsory. (No Gospel canticle, Our Father or Intercessions.) Conclusion- “Let us bless the Lord, and give him thanks.”

Evening Prayer (Vespers) What we are doing! Includes the Gospel Canticle of Mary.

Night Prayer (Compline) Short. Includes Examination of Conscience and Act of Contrition. One or two psalms. Canticle of Simeon. Concluding Blessing: “May the all-powerful Lord grant us a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen.”

Office of Readings (Matins) Longer. Time of day can vary. Three Psalms, 2 Longer readings: #1 Old or New Testament, # 2 Church Fathers. Same closing as Daytime Prayer.

Resource:

Sockey D, *The Everyday Catholic’s Guide to the Liturgy of the Hours*, Servant, Cincinnati, 2013

Series Schedule: Sundays at 5:00 P

2/28 History and Structure of the Liturgy of the Hours

3/14 Praying the Psalms

3/21 Chanting the Evening Prayer

3/7 Introduction to the Book of Christian Prayer

3/28 Keeping the Liturgy of the Hours Going