**Liturgy of the Hours**

Liturgy comes from two Greek words: *leitos*, which means “public,” and *ergos*, which means “work.” So, liturgy is the “public work” of the Church, the communal prayer of the whole Church. The Liturgy of the Hours (also called “The Divine Office”) is part of the official liturgy of the Church. It involves the recitation of hymns, psalms, canticles, and prayers at various set times (“hours”) throughout the day. In total, there are seven hours throughout the day: three major hours and four minor hours. The major hours are the **Office of Readings** (also called Matins), **Morning Prayer** (also called Lauds) and **Evening Prayer** (also called Vespers). The minor hours are **Daytime Prayer** (Midmorning, Midday, Midafternoon), and **Night Prayer**. Priests and those in religious life are typically obligated, as part of their vocation and religious vows, to pray some or all of the seven hours. Lay people are not obligated to pray the hours, but are strongly encouraged to do so.

The *Catechism* describes the Liturgy of the Hours in this way:

The mystery of Christ, his Incarnation and Passover, which we celebrate in the Eucharist especially at the Sunday assembly, permeates and transfigures the time of each day, through the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, "the divine office." This celebration, faithful to the apostolic exhortations to "pray constantly," is "so devised that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God." In this "public prayer of the Church," the faithful (clergy, religious, and lay people) exercise the royal priesthood of the baptized. Celebrated in "the form approved" by the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours "is truly the voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom. It is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to the Father (CCC 1174).

By praying the Liturgy of the Hours, time is sanctified, since each hour corresponds to the time of day in which it is prayed. So, for example, during Morning Prayer, we thank God for a new day and pray that he bless and sanctify the work of the day. And, during Evening Prayer, we give thanks for the graces that God has given us during the day. By praying the Liturgy of the Hours, our whole day is sanctified in our continuous praise of God.

The Liturgy of the Hours is harmonized with the Mass and built around the liturgical seasons (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Triduum, Easter, and Ordinary Time) and feast days of the Church (for example, the Ascension, the Immaculate Conception, and other days honoring the saints). It is an extension of the celebration of the Eucharist (which is the heart of the Church’s liturgy) and also a preparation for it. So, by praying the Liturgy of the Hours, we can enter more fully into the liturgical life of the Church. This allows our whole life to be governed and shaped by “sacred time.” The various seasons and feast days come to shape our day-to-day lives and we are more and more transformed by this reality.

The Church encourages the faithful to prayer these prayers in common but, even when recited individually, they are always the prayer of the whole Church. The Liturgy of the Hours is a powerful way to unite ourselves to Catholics throughout the world by joining in one voice to pray.

After the Mass and sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours has a greater value than any other prayer (personal prayers, devotions, etc.) since it is part of the *official liturgy of the Church*.