

Liturgy of the Hours

Leadership Presentation

March 13, 2018

Opening Prayer

Good morning my brothers and sisters in Carmel!

We, as Carmelites, attempt to find God in silence, stillness and meditation, which we do through a life of prayer. We attempt to know and love God through prayer, so we can then make Him known and loved by others. In order to do this, our prayer life needs to be a conversation with Him, a dialogue between us and Christ. This dialogue needs to be relational with Jesus and He desires that we continue this throughout our days in ceaseless and ongoing prayer. This prayer life for us needs to begin during our waking hours, solidifying us throughout the day and ending each daily cycle with the prayer of the Church, the prayer we are called to each and every day, the prayer we call the Liturgy of the Hours. As Seculars, there are many times we say this prayer in solitude, without the voice of community echoing the words alongside us in our ears and soul, and sometimes in loneliness and perhaps, even drudgery, yet we are always called back to this wonderful, beautiful prayer that opens our hearts and souls to the beckoning call of God. It is these words of the Psalms, prayers, and readings that, as Carmelites, we are always drawn back to. It is the hinge of our day, the turning from morning to evening and to night prayer that centers us, that quiets our lives and makes Christ the center of our universe.

“Lord, open my lips,

And my mouth will proclaim your praise!”

This is how our day begins. And as Carmelites, we keep “pondering” God within our hearts throughout the day, the evening and then into the night. Yet we can all become caught in that repetitive trap of formality and indifference. Fr. Timothy Gallagher writes in a wonderful little book entitled *Praying the Liturgy of the Hours, a Personal Journey* that the Divine Office eventually became for him just an ordinary part of his day, a somewhat boring staple, comparable to having morning Corn Flakes. And Fr. Ronald Rolheiser in a talk last November at the OCDS Congress, likened daily prayer at times to visiting Grandma at the local nursing home every night, where you might, if you are lucky, have one or two meaningful conversations in a year. There are times we forget that this prayer is more than merely words; it is an invitation to be with our Lord.

We, who are here today, as leaders, need to know the Liturgy of the Hours in a way that we can not only pray the Office each day along with all the other Secular Carmelites in the world, but we need to be able to teach how to pray this Office as well. We need to be able to be mentors and guides for this wonderful and incredible prayer for those who come to us, who want to know more about the Liturgy, and those who come to us who have a true calling to the Carmelite way of life. This is a prayer we need to pray in such a way that our actions, deeds and thoughts are guided by a metamorphosis, which slowly changes us each and every time we pray it.

Fr. Gallagher says that he eventually overcame his difficulties with the Liturgy by his realization that the Liturgy of the Hours is a prayer that is personal and forms a relationship with Christ. We need to especially remind ourselves of this when we pray it in solitude. Now, before he prays, Fr. Gallagher recalls certain scriptures before beginning the Office. He writes:

“I began to consider ‘how God our Lord looks upon me’ before each Hour as I pray it. I chose scriptural verses to help me, as, for example, ‘Jesus looking upon him loved him.’ (Mk 10:21) For the space of an Our Father, I would see this loving look of Jesus directed personally toward me. I found this made a great difference in praying the Liturgy of the Hours. It changed the Hours from ‘something to be done with fidelity’ to a relationship: an encounter between two persons. And once the Liturgy of the Hours becomes relational, it became prayer.

“Now as I pray the hymns, psalms, antiphons, readings, and invocations, I (am) listening to and speaking to a Person.”

What a beautiful way to consciously recall the Lord’s presence to us and his love for us in our lives each and every day.

I am sure that in praying the Liturgy of the Hours, there have been times for each of us when the prayers, hymns, readings, and intercessions make us feel as if Christ is sitting right next to us, and then there are other times when our prayers are said in dryness, perhaps even boredom, and we feel that God couldn’t possibly be listening. Yet, deep in our souls we know, as Carmelites, He is there with us. He is persisting on calling to us and beckoning us to journey deeper. He knows us and hears our calls of sorrow and praise. This is a wonderful way to remind us of His love and the relationship we have with Him.

With this in mind, I ask that we all attempt to go deeper into this beautiful prayer, so that we might be able to become closer to the one we seek each and every time we pray the Liturgy of the Hours.

There are four basic rules that I have learned concerning praying the Divine Office, and in teaching these, I am afraid you might need to sound a bit like a group of Southern Baptists at a Sunday tent meeting just for a moment.

“Can I get an AMEN?”

No, really... I mean it!

“CAN I GET AN AMEN!!!”

AMEN is the acronym that we will be using to discuss these rules.

- **A: is for Amen**, as in prayer, as in we need to **prAy** the Office, not say the Office. AMEN!
- **M: is for Mistakes Happen!**
- **E: stands for Enjoy and Embrace Each word.**
- **N: represents the Nuts & Bolts of the Liturgy of the Hours**

We will look at all of these closer in a bit.

The Liturgy of the Hours, like other liturgical actions, is not something private, but belongs to the whole body of the Church, which it manifests and influences. When possible the Liturgy of the Hours should be celebrated communally. Yet we know that this is not possible most days for us Seculars. During our busy lives when we recite the Office alone, instead of praying it in community, we sometimes forget the reverence in which we should be saying the words of the Liturgy of the Hours. Is it any wonder than that when we do get together once a month to pray the Office, many charge through it as if we are in a race attempting to get to the social part of the meeting? A good practice to observe in praying alone is actually whispering the words, or even just moving our lips to form the words silently, in order to fix our pace. Give this a try when you pray the office alone and when teaching this to others as a way to slow us and others down in prayer.

When we pray the Liturgy of the Hours we must slow ourselves, quiet our minds and prepare our hearts, as we should with all of our prayers. We need to start with preparation, to quiet our minds and open our hearts to the voice of God. This method of prayer begins by preparing oneself by withdrawing to a place of solitude within oneself, then turning to the words of the Breviary. When our prayer ends, we also need to take time for thanksgiving and reflection, instead of simply closing the book and quickly returning to our busy lives.

So let's begin by talking about what as Carmelite Seculars we are called to do each and every day, not because we are forced to do it, not as an obligation, but as a turning to the opportunity to praising and praying to Our Father, speaking with his Son, our Savior, and asking guidance from the Holy Spirit. Being able to pray the Liturgy of the Hours needs to be embraced as one

of the most important, active attempts of our days to turn our thoughts and hearts to God each morning, evening, and night. We as Carmelites are connected to God not in the *doing* of our lives, but in the *praying* that draws us closer to Him. It is through this deep wonderful connective prayer that allows us to reflect God into the lives we touch by going out into the world after praying, knowing that God is at our sides. On this day, and the beginning of every day, Jesus is waiting to meet us, to be with us. We must be the ones to respond “God, come to my assistance, Lord make haste to help me.”

As we pray, whether we are in a group or alone, we need to remember that prayer is dialogue, a conversation, a give and take with a friend. When we pray the Liturgy of the Hours alone, we too often turn the prayer and dialogue with God into a quick reading, a perfunctory scanning, or even a skimming of the words, instead of a reverent search or quest for understanding each verse and phrase. When out of necessity we say our Liturgy of the Hours in solitude, we need to perform the prayer with the same reverence we do when we are in a large community. When praying alone, again, it is recommended that we whisper the words, saying them aloud to ourselves, or at least mouthing the words to slow us down from reverting to simply reading the Office without praying it.

So let us explore first where the Liturgy of the Hours comes from, as the Divine Office we turn to each and every day is based solely in the Bible. The Liturgy of the Hours is a *liturgy*, which means a formal rite for public worship. The Liturgy of the Hours means “Praying Formal Prayers around the Clock.”

How do we get seven hours of prayer? They originate from careful reading of Scripture and tradition. Psalm 119, verse 164 states: “Seven times a day I will praise you.” The Bible enumerates all of these times:

- The Jewish people prayed together at the last hour of the day when the lamps were lit and at the first hour of dawn. (1 & 2)
- In the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples came together for prayer at the third hour (9am). See Acts 1:14 coupled with Acts 2: 1-15 (3)
- Peter went to the housetop to pray about the sixth hour; Acts 10:9. (4)
- Peter and John were going up to the temple for prayer at the ninth hour, which is 3pm, in Acts 3:1. (5)
- Late at night, Paul and Silas were praying about midnight; Acts 16:25. (6)
- Sometime between 3 and 6am Jesus ended His prayer time to walk across the Sea of Galilee and approach his disciples who were battling a storm. (7)

During the early years of Christianity, after Constantine legalized the practice of Christian worship in 313 AD, people would gather before and after their work days to pray the Psalms.

And later, as monasteries became the centers of Christianity, St. Benedict wanted his monks to pray seven times daily, to correspond with Scripture. He called the seven hours of prayer the “Opus Dei,” meaning the work of God. As Christians begun praying these hours the prayers developed into the Liturgy of the Hours, the formal prayers of the Church to say around the clock.

The Divine Office is broken down into praying up to seven prayers each day.

- The Office of Readings
- The Office of Morning Prayer (which for us includes the Invitatory)
- Midmorning Prayer
- Midday Prayer
- Midafternoon Prayer
- Evening Prayer
- The Office of Night Prayer

As Carmelite Seculars we are asked to go deeper into at least three of these prayers every day, in attempts to commune with God: Morning Prayer with the Invitatory, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer. One may recite the *Office of Readings* at any hour of the day, and is optional for us.

Let’s examine these prayers a bit more closely, especially focusing on Morning & Evening Prayer, the true hinges of the Liturgy, and go deeper into the words in order that we can commune with our Creator, talk with our Savoir and praise and venerate our God with reverence and adoration.

What we are attempting today is to make all of us as leaders more comfortable with praying the Divine Office in community and then enabling all of us to be better able to return to our Carmelite groups to teach others to do the same. I am sure we have all observed during annual retreats or Congresses there are almost always difficulties when asking people to volunteer to lead those in attendance in our daily prayers. This hesitation of leaders to be able to have the self-assurance and confidence to lead a group is something that we would like to begin to overcome today.

While praying the Divine Office we don’t hear people say, “You are going way too slow, please speed it up” or “You need to hurry up, pray faster,” “Come on, pick up the pace!” I have never heard anyone complain, “You know, I think you are praying way too slow.”

I ask that you please remember this and to incorporate this into your lessons when you teach the Liturgy of the Hours after you return to your communities. We need to slow our prayer life and pray with loving reverence and pauses; intentionally realizing who it is we are communing

with and why we are doing this, and who is calling us to ponder these words each and every day. This is not a prayer to be said, whether alone or in community, in a hurried, hastened or matter of fact way, so we can quickly go on to our next obligation of the day. Our prayer is not to be recited as in reading a novel, a newspaper article, or even in reading Scripture aloud from the Ambo at our Churches at Mass. The Liturgy of the Hours is prayed at its best and recited in community when done in a harmonious and flat-toned way. It is away where no individual voice is heard, no oratory inflection used and no voice overshadows the person to our left or right, never attempting to alter the tone or fixed rhythm of what is being prayed. We need to be praying the same words in praise to God in harmony together, with one voice praising His name.

Now let's look at the 4 rules I referred to earlier: Can I get an Amen?

Rule 1 (A): *Give Me an AMEN* - "Do not SAY the Office - PRAY the Office."

- We as Carmelites love prayer. That's usually the first signal that we are being called to this life. We seek a personal experience with God, and to do this we attempt to first calm our monkey minds, quite the wild horses, as our mother St. Teresa wrote. God calls people in different ways; he calls Carmelites though through this love, this desperate need, and desire for prayer.
- Prayer is relational, and we need to remember who it is we are in the presence of as we sit to begin praying the Office. We need to remind ourselves of this each time we come to pray. We are placing ourselves in the Holy presence of our Creator. The Liturgy of the Hours is not a task we must get through; it is a prayer of love that we are called to.
- St. John of Damascus stated, "Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God."
- And St. Teresa wrote, "Before prayer, endeavor to realize whose Presence you are approaching, and to whom you are about to speak. We can never fully understand how we ought to behave towards God, before whom the angels tremble."
- Our prayer life is one of adoration and love properly arranging our lives around God, the reorganizing of oneself with the Divine Center.
- As we sit to pray the Liturgy of Hours we need to quiet ourselves, place ourselves in the presence of God and rid ourselves of our attachments to the world.
- Everyone should use the same tone and rhythm when in community to establish one voice.
- We must concentrate on our breathing during the Liturgy: The Psalms are lyrics, or poems, and designed to say out loud. That is why lines come to an end in the way they do. The author is instructing us all to pause and to breathe.

- We need to remember Sacred Silence during prayer and the times for reflection during the Office.
 - At the conclusion of each Psalm after the antiphon is repeated we should pause.
 - And after the Reading we need to pause and take time to reflect.
- We need to *pray* the Liturgy of the Hours and not *say* it. Whether we are alone or in community, we need to pray the words slowly, reverently by placing ourselves in the presence of God. We need to breathe slowly, meditating on the words we are praying.
- Again, say the words or mouth the words to assist in the process of slowing ourselves. Breathe at the end of each line, reflect after the repetition of each antiphon and quiet ourselves at the end of the Reading.

Can I get an AMEN?

Rule 2 (M): *Mistakes happen!* Simply allow the Liturgy to keep bringing us back to focusing on prayer.

- “Pray as you can, not as you cannot.”
- The Liturgy of the Hours is a conversation, a dialogue between us and God. If we make a mistake, it is still prayer.
- We certainly need to help others in learning the Liturgy of the Hours, yet it is not in charity to suddenly stop others in prayer if a small mistake is made. Use a mistake as a teaching tool at the end of prayer to go back to, instead of interrupting prayer as it is happening.
- Please don’t stop and say, “Oh! That’s horrible. Don’t say it *that* way!” Allow the prayer to finish before teaching and correcting.
- Remember that if we are not in our own community or Province, others might pray the Liturgy a bit differently. Some might say the Psalm Prayer, while others might not divide the “Glory to the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and will be forever.” Please don’t try to stop a prayer and show others the errors of their ways by demonstrating our superior knowledge, unless we are leading the prayer and are actually in the process of teaching it to others.
- Say we are sitting by ourselves in our chairs reflecting on prayer and we finish the Invitatory, and instead of turning to Morning Prayer, we mistakenly start praying the Office of the Readings, this is still prayer. Perhaps God is leading us to discover something new this day and that it is in those readings instead of what is in Morning Prayer. Don’t be too harsh on yourselves. “Pray as you can, not as you can’t.”
- Many of us are Lectors or Eucharistic Ministers in our own parishes. What is one of the first rules we learn? “Whatever happens, don’t panic!” Same is true in praying in community. No matter what happens, we are in conversation with God. Stay with Him

out of friendship, rather than leave him because you think you broke a golden rule of prayer.

- Allow the breviary to guide us in prayer. Liturgical prayer helps us articulate the yearnings of the heart that cry for expression. Sometimes it is hard for us to find the words to say what we truly feel. At other times we do not feel up to praying and the words of the Liturgy “prime the pump” for us.
- Remember that the Divine Office helps us unite with the “communion of saints.” The enterprise we are undertaking is far greater than we are. Think of it: we are offering up to the throne of grace the very words that have been prayed by followers of Christ for generations.
- Liturgical prayer also helps us stand against the temptation to become spectacular and entertaining. A charismatic personality is unnecessary, and never appreciated in community prayer. Clever words become useless; brilliant insights are not needed. A strong individual voice to vibrate the chandeliers is not wanted. We pray the words that have always been prayed. This helps us to keep our focus on God instead of ourselves.
- Praying the Liturgy of the Hours also helps us resist the temptation of “private religiosity.” It is so very human of us to allow our petty concerns to be the whole burden of our prayer. Now, it is not wrong to pray about our own pressing needs, but that must never be the end of our prayer work. Through the Liturgy we are constantly being brought back to the life of the whole community; we are constantly being confronted with sound Catholic doctrine; we are constantly being forced to hear the lament of the poor, the desolate, and see the turmoil of the world’s nations.
- The stateliness and formality of the Liturgy helps remind us that we are in the presence of real Royalty – we are invited to be with God Himself!

Can I get an AMEN?

Rule 3 (E): Enjoy and Embrace Each word

- No matter how you pray, make a divine and joyful noise to the Lord.
- The Liturgy of the Hours is the prayer of the Church.
- “Sing to the Lord a new song, His praise from the end of the Earth”: Isaiah 42
- Just listen to some of these wonderful antiphons we pray during prayer:
 - I will sing to you, O Lord; I will learn from you the way of perfection.
 - O God, I will sing to you a new song.
 - In the presence of the angels I will sing to you, my God.

- Or the great Canticle we pray each evening:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

My spirit rejoices in God my Savior

For he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

- We need to remember that this prayer is being said by people all over the world.
- At the same time that we are praying, others, including all Carmelites, priests, nuns, bishops, religious, brothers and friars, groups of different Orders, and some members of the laity are all praying this same prayer and then passing it on to others to continue to pray it.
- The Hours, as we just discussed, are based on scripture. We know that Jesus went off by himself into the hills and desert at different times of the day to pray.
- “Pray, ask, seek in my name.” In scripture Christ gave us a formula:
 - Prayers of praise
 - Thanksgiving
 - Petitions
 - Intercession
- Jesus knew the Psalms and prayed them. As Christians who wish to imitate Him in all ways, there is no greater prayer to pray than the Liturgy of the Hours.
- Christ has taught us the necessity of praying at all times without losing heart. (Luke 18:1) The Liturgy of the Hours is distinguished from other liturgical actions by the fact that it consecrates to God the whole cycle of day and night, as it has done from early Christian times.
- The Liturgy of the Hours is an exchange or dialogue between God and man in which, “God speaks to his people... and his people reply to him in song and prayer.”
- This prayer is “the voice of the bride herself as she addresses the bridegroom, indeed, it is also the prayer of Christ and his body to the Father.” The voice of the Church is not just its own, it is also the voice of Christ, since its prayers are offered in the name of Christ, that is, “through our Lord Jesus Christ,” and so the Church continues to offer the prayers and petitions which Christ poured out in the days of his earthly life and which have therefore a unique effectiveness.
- In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, number 1174 states, “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 demonstrates how closely the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours are connected.

- In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy solemnly put forth by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963 number 83 states:
 “Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the entire community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise.
 “For he continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. She does this, not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by praying the Divine Office.”

The Liturgy of the Hours is the Hymn Christ introduced to us.

Can I get an AMEN!

Rule 4 (N): The Nuts and bolts of the Liturgy of the Hours

- St. Ambrose tells us, “We talk with God when we pray; we listen to him when we read God’s word.”
- There is an Order within the Divine Office and its Celebrations
 - Solemnities: every Sunday is a Solemnity, which is a solemn celebration of the Church, the highest Church holiday. It is celebrated by the whole Church.
 - Feasts: a high celebration of the Church but not quite as important as a Solemnity. However, it is still celebrated by the whole Church.
 - Memorials: some Memorials are celebrated by the whole Church. Optional Memorials mean that any individual or parishes MAY celebrate the Memorial if desired.
 - Commemorations: similar to an Optional Memorial and occur only during Lent/Easter and Advent/Christmas
- Solemnities, Feasts, Memorials and Commemorations are special celebrations in the Church. Both the Proper of the Saints and the Commons in the Breviary are used in praying the offices for these days.
- No Feast, Memorial, or Commemoration takes place of the Sunday celebration. However, if another Solemnity falls on a Sunday during Ordinary Time, the other Solemnity is celebrated instead of the Sunday for Ordinary Time.
- When praying go from Specific readings -> Less specific readings -> General readings. We will hopefully explore this more in the Workshop portion of our day.

- The hinge of the Liturgy of the Hours is Morning and Evening Prayer, which should never be omitted except for a serious reason. These are the double hinged prayers of the daily Office and are therefore to be considered the principal Hours and should be celebrated as such.
- And in number 1176 of the CCC we are told: “The celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours demands not only harmonizing the voice with the praying heart, but also a deeper understanding of the liturgy and of the Bible, especially of the Psalms.”
- Psalm 5:3 - “I say this prayer to you Yahweh, for at daybreak you listen for my voice; And at dawn I hold myself in readiness for you, I watch for you.” As quoted from the Jerusalem Bible
- We will look at more examples on how to better pray the Liturgy of the Hours in the next part of this presentation.

In conclusion, and before we begin the workshop portion concerning the Liturgy, I would like us to remember that people are formed by the way they worship. We, as Carmelites, are formed by the Liturgy of the Hours. We are fed by the Prayer of the Church, the Word, by the Eucharist and by each other. These nurture us and structure the foundations of our Carmelite way of life. We are the pray-ERS, the ones called to sit in silence, to meditate and ponder the Word, the Divine Office, the Liturgy of the Hours. It is through this prayer that we attempt to know and to love God throughout the day, and then live a life to make God known and loved. We as Carmelites are called to pray the Office in a way that is *praying without ceasing*, so that we can, as our wonderful St. Therese exclaimed in her *Act of Oblation to Merciful Love*, proclaim in the way we live and cry out, “O My God! Most Blessed Trinity, I desire to Love you and make you Loved...”

Remember, we are called to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, *not* to simply say it. We are called to be the pray-ERS of the Church. Our lives need to focus on prayer and to live prayer. I will end with a quote from the great Catholic writer Flannery O’Connor who wrote:

“The only force I believe in is prayer, and it is the force I apply with more doggedness than attention.”

St. Teresa, pray for us;

St. John of the Cross, pray for us;

St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, pray for us;

St. Therese, the Little Flower, pray for us!

Amen