

Apostolic Constitution

**Promulgating the Divine Office as Revised in Accordance with
the Decree of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican**

Paul Bishop

Servant of the Servants of God

In Perpetual Remembrance

The Canticle of Praise, unceasingly hymned in heaven and brought into this world of ours by our High Priest Jesus Christ, has been faithfully continued by his Church throughout the ages, though in a variety of forms.

In course of time a liturgy arose within the local churches under the leadership of the priest as a kind of necessary complement to the Sacrifice of the Eucharist, the highest act of worship of God, at definite times and places extending this worship into the different hours of daily life.

Gradually a book of the Divine Office evolved as an effective means for this purpose. Throughout the centuries many changes were made in this common formula for celebrating the Office, but this is not to be wondered at because the book, called the Breviary, was designed to suit the various ideas regarding it as they arose.

Because of the lack of time the Council of Trent was unable to complete a reform of this Breviary and this work was left to the Holy See. Our Predecessor, Saint Pius V, in the year 1568 promulgated the new Roman Breviary which sought to bring uniformity in this matter into the Latin Church. Later on this was revised by Popes Sixtus V, Clement VIII, Urban VIII, Clement XI, and others.

In 1911 Saint Pius X brought out a new Breviary which had been prepared at his command. The tradition of the early Church of reciting the whole of the 150 psalms every week was restored, and the whole method of dividing up the psalter was revised so as to avoid repetition, and a way was devised of combining the ferial psalter and the continuous reading of the Bible with the offices of the saints. In addition the Sunday office was raised in dignity so that it usually took precedence over the feasts of saints.

The whole work of restoring the Sacred Liturgy was undertaken by Pius XII. A new translation of the psalter was made by the Pontifical Biblical Institute and he allowed this to be used in public and private recitation of the Office. In 1947 he set up a special Commission to examine the whole question of the Breviary, and a questionnaire about it was sent to the bishops of the world in 1955. The first fruits of the work were seen in the decree of 23 March 1955 simplifying the rubrics, and in the regulations about the Breviary in the Code of Rubrics published by John XXIII in 1960. But when he authorized part of the liturgical renewal in this way, Pope John XXIII realized that more investigation was needed into the fundamental principles governing the Sacred Liturgy, and so he entrusted this work to the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican which he had convoked. As a result the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy dealt at such length and in such depth with the whole matter, and especially with the Church's daily prayer, as had hardly ever before happened in the history of the Church.

While the Vatican Council was still continuing and as soon as the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy had been promulgated, We decided to put its decisions into effect, by setting up the Consilium, composed of experts in liturgy and theology and have the help of those skilled in pastoral theology and the spiritual life. After working diligently for seven years it composed a new book

of the Liturgy of the Hours. Its principles and content were approved by the whole Consilium and by the Synod of Bishops which met in 1967, after consultation with all the bishops of the Church and many diocesan priests, religious and lay people.

It will be useful to speak about the principles which underlie this new form of the Liturgy of the Hours:

- 1 As expressly requested by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy account has been taken of the circumstances in which these days priests have to perform their work of the apostolate. The Office has therefore been composed so that it is the prayer not only of the clergy but of the whole of the People of God, and religious and lay people can take part in it, and there are various forms of celebration so that it can be accommodated to the various groups, with their differing needs.
- 2 Since the Liturgy of the Hours should sanctify the different times of the day, in its revised form it can be fitted into the actual hours of people's daily lives. The Hour of Prime has been abolished; the most important Hours are Lauds as morning prayer and Vespers as evening prayer, and these become the two hinges, as it were, of the daily Office; the Office of Readings, while retaining its nocturnal character for those who wish to celebrate a vigil, is now of such a nature that it can be said at any time during the day; while the Prayer during the Day has been so arranged that it can be said before noon, at midday or in the afternoon without omitting any part of the four-week psalter
- 3 So that voice and mind can be more in harmony and the Office be, in the words of the Constitution, *a source of piety and nourishment of personal prayer*,¹ in this new book of the Hours there is a reduction in what has to be said, and yet a wider variety of texts; and such things as titles for the psalms, antiphons, psalm prayers and optional periods of silence have been put forward as a help towards prayerful meditation on the psalms.
- 4 In accordance with the request of the Council,² the weekly recitation of the whole psalter has been abolished in favour of a four-week cycle; use is made of a new translation of the psalter prepared by the Commission for a new edition of the Vulgate which We have set up; a few of the psalms and the harsher verses of the psalms have been omitted because of difficulties which might arise in celebration of the Office in a vernacular translation; at Lauds some new canticles from the Old Testament have been added to increase the spiritual nature of this Hour; and at Vespers some of the rich and splendid canticles from the New Testament have been incorporated.
- 5 In the new series of readings from Sacred Scripture there is a wider treasury of the Word of God. The readings have been chosen to harmonize with the readings at Mass. The passages in themselves show a unity of argument, and during the course of the year they try to present the principal chapters in the history of salvation.
- 6 In accordance with the norms laid down by the Council the readings from the Fathers and other ecclesiastical writers have been revised to give a better selection. In addition, so that greater fruit can be obtained from a wider reading, another lectionary will be prepared which can be used at choice.

1 Vatican II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n 90.

2 *Ibid*, n 91.

- 7 Anything which is not historically true as been suppressed from this text, and so all lessons, especially hagiographical lessons, have been revised so as to present rather the spiritual significance of the saints in the life of the Church.
- 8 At Lauds intercessions have been added to consecrate the day in order to prepare for the work of the day; while at Vespers supplications have been added following the pattern of the Prayer of the Faithful. At the end of these intercessions and supplications the Lord's Prayer is recited. Taking into account that it is also recited at Mass, this means that there is a return to the ancient Christian custom of reciting this Prayer three times during the day.

This complete revision of the official prayer of the Church, taking into account both the oldest tradition and the needs of modern life, will, it is hoped, renew and vivify all Christian prayer and serve to nourish the spiritual life of the People of God. We hope, therefore, that the command of our Lord Jesus Christ to his Church to pray without ceasing³ will be fulfilled, since the Liturgy of the Hours, spread as it is over the various hours of the day, will be of great assistance in this, especially when a group assembles together for this purpose and thus presents an unmistakable sign of the Praying Church.

Christian prayer is primarily the prayer of the entire community of mankind joined to Christ himself.⁴ Each individual has his part in this prayer which is common to the one Body, and it thus becomes the voice of the beloved Spouse of Christ, putting into words the wishes and desires of the whole Christian people and making intercession for the necessities common to all mankind. It obtains its unity from the heart of Christ himself. Our Redeemer, as he himself had entered into life through his prayer and sacrifice wished that this should not cease throughout the ages in his Mystical Body, the Church,⁵ and so the official prayer of the Church is at the same time *the very prayer which Christ himself, together with his Body, addresses to the Father.*⁶ Thus when the Divine Office is said, our voices re-echo in Christ and his in us.⁷

In order that this shall come about it is necessary that *that warm and living love for Scripture*⁸ which emanates from the Liturgy of the Hours shall be renewed among all, so that in truth Sacred Scripture becomes the principal source of all Christian prayer. The psalms especially, showing as they do the action of God in the history of salvation, must be better understood by the People of God, and this will come about more easily if among the clergy there is promoted a deeper study of the psalms as they are used in the liturgy, and if this is then handed on to the faithful by efficient catechesis. Then this more fruitful use of the Scriptures in the Mass and in the Liturgy of the Hours will bring about a continuous meditation on the history of salvation and its continuation in the life of men.

Since the life of Christ in his Mystical Body perfects and elevates the personal life of each of the faithful, there can be no opposition between the prayer of Christ and the personal prayer of the individual, but instead the relationship between them is strengthened by the Divine Office. Mental prayer is nourished by the readings and psalms and other parts of the Liturgy of the Hours; and if the method and form of the celebration is chosen which most helps the persons taking part, one's personal, living prayer must of necessity be helped. Then the prayer of the Office as it becomes truly personal prayer forms a clear link between the liturgy and the whole life

3 Cf Lk 18:1; 21:36; 1 Thess 5:17; Eph 6:18.

4 Vatican II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n 83.

5 Cf Pius XII, *Encyclical Letter Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947, n 2.

6 Vatican II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n 84.

7 Cf St Augustine, *Enarrationes in ps.* 85, n 1.

8 Vatican II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n 24.

of the Christian, since every hour of the day and night is itself a kind of *leitourgia* wherein they give themselves to the ministry of the love of God and their fellow-men, and are joined to the actions of Christ who by his life among men and by his sacrifice sanctified the life of men. This deepest truth of the Christian life is shown forth and at the same time brought about by the Liturgy of the Hours, and so it is offered to all the faithful, even to those who are not bound by law to recite it.

Those who have received from the Church the mandate to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours should reverently recite the whole daily Office, keeping as far as possible to the true times of the day for the various Hours, and giving pride of place to Lauds and Vespers. Let those who have received Sacred Orders and thereby in a special way bear in themselves the sign of Christ the Priest, and those who by the vows of religious profession have been specially consecrated to the service of God and the Church, recite the Office not merely because it is a duty laid on them by law, but let them feel themselves moved to it because of its inherent excellence and because of its spiritual and pastoral assistance. It is to be hoped that for all the public prayer of the Church will have its source in a renewal of the spirit and an acknowledged necessity that the whole Body of Christ will follow its Head as a praying Church.

By means of this new book of the Liturgy of the Hours which We now sanction, approve and promulgate by Our Apostolic Authority, let there resound throughout the Church a magnificent hymn of praise to God, and let it be united to that hymn of praise sung in the courts of heaven the angels and saints. May the days of our earthly exile be filled more and more with that praise which throughout the ages is given to the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb.⁹

We hereby decree that this new book of the Liturgy of the Hours may be used as soon as it is published. Episcopal Conferences are to take care to bring out vernacular versions and, when the approval and confirmation of the translation has been given by the Holy See, decide the date from when it may or must be used, in whole or in part. From the date on which a vernacular version must be used, those who recite the Divine Office in the Latin language may use only this renewed form of the Liturgy of the Hours. But in the case of those who, because of age or other special reason, would experience great difficulty in following this new Order, with the consent of their own Ordinary they may use the former edition of the Roman Breviary in whole or in part, but only when saying the Office alone.

This Our Constitution is to have effect for the future, notwithstanding, as necessary, any Constitution or Decree of Our Predecessors, or any other prescription, even worthy of special mention, which would derogate from this.

Given at Saint Peter's, Rome, on the Solemnity of All Saints, 1 November, in the year 1970, the eighth year of Our Pontificate.

Paul VI, Pope

⁹ Cf Rev 5:13