

Queries on the Liturgy of the Hours*

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1. **Introductory Verse** — If the Office of Readings is joined to Lauds, is it necessary to repeat the verse *Deus in adiutorium* with the *Gloria Patri* at the beginning of the later?

The answer is negative, on the basis of the General Institution, n. 99, which says: "If the Office of the readings is said immediately before another Hour of the Office, then the Office of the readings can be preceded by the reading of the hymn for that Hour; then at the end of the Office of the readings the prayer and conditions are omitted, and in the following Hour the introductory verse with the *Gloria Patri* is omitted.

2. **Antiphons** — Is the Antiphon repeated at the end of the Psalm?

The general Institution of the Liturgy of the Hours says at n. 123: "After the psalm the antiphon can be repeated, according as to whether it is opportune or not". What is meant here by "opportune"? The question of opportuneness arises in connection with the different ways of singing of psalm (cf. *Istituzione* n. 121 s.). A psalm can be spoken or sung, by one person or alternated, sung in unison by all, or subdivided among the parts of the members of the choir. According, therefore, as to how the psalm is sung, it will be decided whether the antiphon will be said only at the beginning, or after every verse, or after every division of the psalm, or else at the end. In itself, the antiphon is more than justified at the beginning because it gives the psalm the Christian sense, or the sense it has in the particular liturgical celebration of the day. But at the end of the psalm the antiphon, while it is justified in the sung Office because it frames the psalm perfectly on the conceptual and melodic plane, has not the same force in the recited Office.

* *L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO*, January 20, 1972, pp. 5 and 10.

- 3 **Prayer for the Dead**—Previously, the prayer for every Hour concluded with the invocation *Fidelium Animae per misericordiam Dei requiescant in pace*. Not so in the new Liturgy of the Hours. Do we not pray for the souls of the dead anymore?

The prayer for the dead exists every day, at Vespers, which seemed the suitable place. Every day, in fact, the *preces* of Vespers end with the prayer of the faithful (cf. *Istituzione*, n. 186) and makes us renew "the act of faith in the realities of Purgatory" and "practice the Communion of Saints".

As it is known, it was in the Middle Ages that it became customary to remember the dead in the Office, owing to the numerous legacies bequeathed to cathedral and religious churches. In a good many of the latter, the Office of the Dead was said every day, after the current Office, to satisfy the requirements of some legacy. Then less frequent, and the Office for the Dead was said only once a week. St. Pius V made it optional, but at the end of all the canonical Hours he made it obligatory to include the verse "*Fidelium animae . . .*".

The present reform has kept this element of worship and has placed it in the "*preces*" at Vespers with varying formulas, reflecting the manifold reality of the Beyond. Furthermore, to end every Hour with the *Fidelium animae* said in a low, almost mournful voice by the choir leader, seemed less consonant with the prayer of the Hours, which should inspire praise and joyfulness.

- 4 **Blessing**—At the end of the morning Lauds and of Vespers the officiating priest imparts the blessing to those present. If the one officiating is a Bishop should he bless with one sign of the cross or with three?

A Bishop will bless as at pontifical Mass, making three signs of the cross. The details that distinguish a liturgical action presided over by a Bishop will be set forth carefully in the new edition of the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum*, now under revision. Both at Mass and in the Office, and whenever the Bishop blesses, he will continue to make the triple sign of the cross on uttering the name of the three divine Persons.

- 5 **Preparation and Thanksgiving at Mass**—Why not include as Appendix to the Liturgy of the Hours the prayers of preparation and thanksgiving at Mass as has been done for centuries?

Those prayers have been omitted because they do not fall at all within the sphere of the Divine Office. The "*Liturgia Horarum*" is not a manual of prayers: it is a typical edition. And like all the other typical editions of this reform, it contains everything regarding the object of the publication and only that. For some years — not "for centuries" — as a result of the private initiative of various publishers, the prayers of preparation and thanksgiving at Mass, the litanies, and some blessings — the blessing for travellers, blessing at table, and other formularies of the kind — had been placed in an appendix to the Breviary. The recent typical editions, too, followed this system, perhaps to keep up with the others.

The present liturgical reform has, among other aims, also the purpose of putting order in the liturgical books. The Congregation for Worship will also make provision for "devotions" — in accordance with its specific aims — with a "*Liber precum*" which will contain, duly selected, everything useful for private devotion.

Editions in the vernacular, or any other Latin editions, *iuxta typicam*, are perfectly free to add any appendices they consider useful. But the *editio typica* did not do so in order not to perpetuate the impression of confusion given by the terminal part of the old "*Breviary*".

Will this cause the priest to give up the habit of prayer? We do not think so, just as it cannot be attributed to the disappearances from most sacristies of the special boards and kneeling-stools for the preparation and thanksgiving at Mass. It is a problem of formation and education to prayer, not of aids, which are not lacking today for people of good will.

6. **Obligation of the Office** — Is the praying of the Liturgy of the Hours still an obligation?

This has been discussed on several occasions but it is worthwhile going back to the subject because ideas do not seem to be clear yet, at least judging by the direct appeals and by what is sometimes written in periodicals.

One written fact is the following: people are beginning to be convinced that the *Institutio Generalis* has not weakened the obligation of the Divine Office in substance, that is, as regards the part prescribed for the daily cycle of prayer. There is no substantial difference between n. 29 of the *Institutio* and can. 135. The *Institutio* merely

expresses in terms that are more acceptable liturgically what can. 135 prescribes in a precise juridical form.

But why list explicitly the degree of obligation for the single hours? Because this classification has been formulated in the past in a form that is no longer acceptable today. And it seemed advisable that the process of updating should be extended to this detail too.

It is a question of a juridico-moral law with which the Church intends to provide (particularly in the case of those who, by their condition — beneficiaries — are more directly and personally consecrated to the welfare of the whole Christian community) nourishment for the spiritual life, without which the personal ministry itself would be sterile and the Church would lack an element essential for its spiritual vitality.

The gravity of possible transgression of the norm given by the *Institutio* is revealed by a moral evaluation of all the elements needed to formulate an honest and objective judgement (frequency, matter, disposition of the subject, circumstances, etc.). These are all the elements that vary from case to case and cannot be "codified": for this reason recourse is had rightly, to judgement and moral sense. This, in our case, applies to all the Hours of the daily cursus (at one time it would have been called "pensum"), and not just for Lauds and Vespers, where the expression of the *Institutio* is: "ne omittant nisi gravi de causa". It is necessary to change our mentality: one should comply with an obligation to satisfy a spiritual inner necessity, not to avoid grave sin.

In conclusion: the obligation of the Hours remains. But instead of being presented in terms of compulsion, as if it derived from an imperious and arbitrary law, it is presented in terms of an essential requirement of the Church, the mystical body of Christ, and for all those who, for special reasons, are obliged to carry out this form of prayer.

Such a concept of obligation, based on the nature of supernatural realities, makes it far stronger than a concept based on authoritarianism, which most men today have difficulty in accepting (cf. A.M. Rouget, *Liturgia delle Ore*, 4 edition, Milan, Ancora, 1971, p. 102).

The evaluation of this obligation must be carried out on the basis of the common criteria suggested by moral theology.

What is the significance with regard to the obligation of the *Horum veritas*, discussed in n. 29 of the Institute? When the astronomical time of each Hour is past, does the obligation to say it remain?

Here too, there can be no doubt about the answer: the obligation to say it remains. It is a slight incongruity, but the legislator's intention is clear. For this reason the clause "quantum fieri potest" has been included. It invites us to say every Hour in the corresponding span of time, but it does not dispense us from saying the same Hour at another time, if we have been prevented from saying it at the right time.

7. **Pious Devotions** — Is it possible to replace the Liturgy of the Hours with other pious devotions?

They are two different things. Divine Office is a liturgical prayer, recited at the command of the Church; the "pious practice" is carried out by the subjective choice or by the positive arrangement of a practical rule of life. The ideal would be to merge the two elements by entering into the spirituality of the Church, expressed in the liturgy. As long as they remain separate, one must not be confused with the other; far less can liturgical action be replaced by a pious practice.

ARMY OF GOD

"Our ranks are decreasing. Maybe this is the way God wants it. Maybe He is doing to us what He did to Gideon. He told Gideon to go out and fight the Medianites. He had an army of 30,000. God told him to send home the cowards. Do you know how many cowards there were? 20,000. Two thirds. Only 10,000 were left. Of these, Gideon retained only 300. That was the army of Gideon. God is thinning our ranks. We are the elect. We are the army of God. Let us give ourselves to God and then we will be effective in the world."

Archbishop Fulton Sheen