FOH June 28, 2009

Liturgia Horarum

(Liturgy of the Hours)

or Divine Office

When I took the class on Psalms with Steven Schweitzer, he had us reading the Divine Office. We read 150 psalms in the course of a week, according to the Liturgy of the Hours. It was a blessing for me, and since this time, I had wondered how I could integrate a liturgy of the hours in my life.

So this Kentucky Holy Land Pilgrimage gave me the occasion to go back to this project. I wanted to find out as much as I could about the Liturgy of the Hours and the Divine Office, as I knew I would participate in offices during this week.

Some of you might wonder what I am talking about! So, let me give you some explanation: The Liturgy of the Hours is the recitation of certain Christian prayers at fixed hours according to the discipline of the Roman Catholic Church, or the recitation of such prayers in Christianity more generally.

This morning, first, I will explain the origins of the Liturgy of the Hours and second, I will present a personal Liturgy of the Hours, which you could possibly use if you are interested.

1. Presentation of Liturgia Horarum

The backbone of the Liturgy of the Hours is the 150 psalms. This liturgy have its origin in Jewish traditions. The Jewish recited prayers at certain hours of the day or of the night. Biblical Basis: ***Seven times a day have I praised you (Ps 119:164). At midnight I arose to give you praise (Ps 119:62).***

The apostles observed the Jewish custom of praying at the third, sixth and ninth hour and at midnight. The Christian prayer of that time consisted of almost the same elements as the Jewish:

recital or chanting of psalms, reading of the Old Testament, to which were added readings of the Gospels, Acts, and epistles, and canticles. Other elements were added later in the course of the centuries.

"A great variety of prayer patterns flourished in the Christian Churches throughout the Roman Empire, and beyond, during the first few centuries of Christianity. Common to all these patterns, though, were the meetings in the morning, the evening, and occasionally during the night for prayers. The powerful symbols of light and dark, the rising and setting of the sun, came to be an integral part of these prayer services. Morning prayers were focused on the Risen Messiah, evening prayers on the continual need for forgiveness and protection from the cosmic forces, night prayers on the coming of the messiah at the end of time."

These hours were also full of specifically Christian symbolism: the Holy Spirit first came upon the disciples at the third hour ***(Acts 2:15) READ****;*

Peter experienced his vision of the church while praying at the sixth hour ***(Acts 10: 9) READ;***

and he cured a paralytic at the ninth hour **(Acts 3:1) READ**.

And : Acts 10:3, 16:25.

After Constantine's conversion, these prayer times (morning, evening, and sometimes in the middle of the night) became common in all the cathedrals throughout the empire.

Later tradition would continue to make these connections between the third, sixth, and ninth hours of daylight and Christian beliefs with the exception that the ninth hour came to be particularly associated with Jesus' crucifixion. In Late Antiquity many monastic communities met together at these hours, in addition to the hours of morning and evening, to sing psalms and pray, and tended to keep vigils every night. Yet even these six prayer times each day were not deemed sufficient in many monastic communities. Quite a few of them ritualized bedtime prayers into a full office called compline and added another morning office, prime, during the first hour of daylight after the sunrise celebration of matins."

Benedict of Nursia (c.480-543), in his *Rule,* laid out specific guidelines for the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours that were to become widely used throughout the West. He wrote them in Latin in the sixth century, probably around 540. By the 11th century, this pattern has

become the standard Western monastic office. The full Benedictine monastic cursus of hours in the West came to look like this:

Vigils – midnight or 4 am. (sometime during the night)
Lauds, or Matins– morning prayer, at daybreak;
Prime – at 7:00 am;
Terce – mid-morning prayer, around 9 am, (at the third hour);
Sext – midday prayer, around noon (at the sixth hour);
None – mid-afternoon prayer, around 3 pm (at the ninth hour);
Vespers – evening prayer, ideally at sunset (at the end of the day);
Compline – at retiring, which completes the day.

Each one of these "hours" of prayer has its own focus, linked particularly to the time of day at which it is celebrated. As St Basil puts it, "each period contains a reminder peculiar to itself of blessings received from God". Their name reflect their focus. But traditional Latin names and times of the day for the Liturgy of the Hours vary slightly. Lauds is associated with morning prayers and especially with psalms 148, 149, and 150. All of these psalms begin with the command 'Praise the Lord!' 'Praise the Lord!' In Latin the verb 'to praise' is *laudare*. And so it came to pass that these psalms were known collectively as 'lauds.'

Vespers is an evening prayer of thanksgiving and praise in Roman Catholic and certain other Christian liturgy. Vespers and lauds are the oldest and most important of the traditional liturgy of the hours.

Vigils, or Matins, is prayed in the heart of the night. The theme is "vigilance" (hence the name "vigil"). Those who keep vigil are sentinels of the night. Lauds is ideally prayed at sunrise, so its actual time can vary depending on the season, and it is the first of the day Hours. Its central theme is praise and resurrection, for it welcomes the coming of the light. Terce, Sext and None are short times of prayer. They are occasions to pause to remember God, to keep mindful of the present moment and of God's presence.

The Second Vatican Council has suppressed Prime, reducing the number of canonical hours to seven (Cf Psalm 119:164). In the Catholic Church, current usage focuses on three Major Hours: The Officium lectionis or Office of Readings (formerly Matins), Lauds and Vespers; and two to four Minor hours: Terce, Sext, None and Compline.

2. Liturgia Horarum in the communities we visited

At St. Meinrad Archabbey, a Benedictine community: the "liturgies" as they call it, are:

Morning Prayer	5:30 a.m. (Vigils and Lauds together)
Mass	7:30 a.m.
Noon Prayer	12:00 p.m.
Evening Prayer	5:00 p.m. (Vespers)

Schedule varies for the morning offices on Sunday.

During the week, the Liturgy of the Hours at St. Meinrad is quite reduced compared with the Benedictine rule; there are only four offices. Vigils and Lauds are at the same time, 5:30 am, and are simply called "Morning Prayer". Mass is at 7:30 and so would be equivalent to Prime. There is no Terce. Prayer at noon is the traditional Sext. There is no None. Vespers, or Evening Prayer, at 5:00 pm, is a little earlier than in the Benedictine rule. Compline at 7:00 pm is much earlier, as it was supposed to happen just before the monks and nuns retired for the night, somewhere around 9:00.

On Sunday, the morning office times differ a little.

At Sisters of Loretto Community:

Lauds	6:30 a.m.
Mass	7:00 a.m.
Vespers	5:15

As far as I could tell, there were only 3 times of prayer in the community of Loretto. In addition to the 2 liturgical Hours, lauds and vespers, they gather for Mass, as in most Catholic communities. It is likely that the sisters observe a wider Liturgy in the Hour on their own, praying individually.

At Gethsemany Abbey:

Vigils	3:15 a.m.
Lauds	5:45 a.m.
Terce	7:30 a.m.
Sext	12:15 p.m.
None	2:15 p.m.
Vespers	5:30 p.m.
Compline	7:30 p.m.

This schedule appears on the leaflet "Gethsemani Retreats". They have kept the original Liturgy of the Hours, with the only revision of the Second Vatican Council. Gethsemani being a Trappist monastery, prayer is central and fundamental to the life onf the monks. Therefore, it is not surprising that they would put emphasis on the Liturgy of the Hours.

At the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill:

There were no Liturgy of the Hours. The Shakers were (are) not Catholic and would not observe any traditional Catholic liturgy, of course. Their spirituality was expressed in a very different way. They emphasized the spontaneity. Their worship could last hours and was very exuberant, with dances, whirling, occasional weeping, and even shaking. Sermons were mostly not prepared, but delivered when someone was suddenly seized by the power of the Holy Spirit. Their spirituality is as opposite to the Liturgy of the Hours as can be!

We were not part of all these different worship style –especially the Shakers-, but we had a taste of each. How interesting and different! The spirituality of each community reflect its calling, whether centered on prayer as the Trappist Gethsemani or on work and "free expression" as the Shakers. And, of course, there are many good things to be learned from each tradition.

3. A Personalized Liturgia Horarum

In 'Silence in the City, Esther de Waal writes: *"The monastic horarium established an enviable framework in which to live like this, providing a context which made it easier than for most of us. Nevertheless, it contains an underlying wisdom and it is worth thinking how it might still apply today."*

Most of us have such a busy schedule that taking time for prayer seems almost a luxury. Actually, the busiest we are, the more importance we should give to prayer, if we want our work to be really meaningful and fruitful. But how easy it is to forget it! Our natural tendency leads us in an opposite direction, always hopping that when "every thing will be done" one will have time to pray. How ironic and how unrealistic!. Still, this means that taking regular breaks during the day to stop and pray is both a real challenge and a real necessity.

The idea of a Liturgy of the Hours is very appealing to me because it gives a structure to the day. It also provides something regular, so I have hopes of being able, with practice, to remember specific times during the day when I will stop whatever I am doing to pray. The nuns ans monks have a bell which call them to prayer. It is a big help. For us, the absence of a bell, and particularly of a community of prayer means that we must develop a personal discipline. I believe that it is something I can do, and others also, provided I and we work are intentional about it.

During my readings and while praying, I started to gather different ideas for having a more consistent prayer life.

Ideas to keep, to consider and to try:

I could simply interrupt 6 times a day what I am doing to pray, and praying when I wake up during the night. Most of the time, it could just be a short prayer, maybe an ancient and

traditional one, to remind me of God in my life and in my work; to remind me that work is something I do in partnership with God…

In her book, *"seven**sacred**apuses, Living mindfully Through the Hours of the Day"*, macrina wiederkehhr (no capital letters) calls the 7 Hours: The Night Watch, the Awakening Hour, The Blessing Hour, the Hour of Illumination, the Wisdom Hour, the Twilight Hour, and the Great Silence. These titles are inspiring, and could be ponder upon. Also, in this original and helpful book, she suggests a few words as themes for each Hours, which are:

- vigilance and deep listening, mystery and silence, surrender and trust for The Night Watch (midnight until dawn);
- praise and resurrection, joy and delight, the coming of the light for the Awakening Hour (dawn);
- the coming of the Spirit, wind and flame, breath and blessing, strength and courage, the sacredness of work for the Blessing Hour (mid-morning);
- commitment and passion, courage and faithfulness, healing truth and peace for the Hour of Illumination (midday);
- steadfastness, surrender, forgiveness and wisdom, impermanence, aging, maturing , death and transition for the Wisdom Hour (mid-afternoon);
- gratitude praise, serenity, mystery, the lightning of the lamps for the Twilight Hour (evening);
- silence, rest and sleep, darkness, trust and protection, personal sorrow, completion, intimacy for the Great Silence (night).

Another way of following a pattern of prayer would be to stop and pray before starting any regular activity during the day. For example, many Christians, including Mennonites, pray before each meal, whatever the time they are eaten. This practice could be extended to other regular activities, like before getting up, taking a shower, getting outside, starting driving a car, starting to work etc. With this lind of liturgy, and also with others, the last hour could also be a time for a very short prayer which could introduce the examen of consciousness.

But we should not lose "the heartfelt spirit that gave rise to it", or that discipline becomes a tyranny; she adds "When 'I yearn' becomes 'I have to', something dies." This is a trap where

one who is eager to improve her/his own spiritual life could easily fall into. I tend to set for myself high goals that I cannot always achieve, and the result is unnecessary guilt.

Here is my first real attempt at a personal Liturgy of the Hours, that I intend to try to practice for a few months. I plan to change or adapt parts of it, according to my needs.

I am using a notebook especially for the purpose of collecting prayers to be used for different patterns of Liturgy of the Hours, and where I could plan my personal Divine Offices.