

The Morning Office During The Paschal Triduum

One of the challenges of the post Vatican II liturgical reform is the implementation of the Liturgy of the Hours on the parochial scene. It is lamentable that fifteen years after the publication of the revised Office, Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer are so infrequently found on the schedules of parish liturgical services. The success of the effort at implementation is probably proportionate to the determination and enthusiasm of pastoral ministers.

The 1988 *Circular Letter* of the Congregation for Divine Worship *Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts* repeats the challenge. This certainly may be viewed as an indication of its seriousness.

It is recommended that there be a communal celebration of the Office of Readings and Morning Prayer on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. It is fitting that the bishop should celebrate the Office in the cathedral with, as far as possible, the participation of the clergy and people.

This Office, formerly called *Tenebrae*, held a special place in the devotion of the faithful as they meditated upon the passion, death and burial of the Lord while awaiting the announcement of the resurrection.

- *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts*, Congregation for Divine Worship, 1988.

In the context of the above recommendation to celebrate Morning Prayer with the Office of Readings on the two days of the year when mornings are not ordinarily overcrowded with liturgical celebrations, the challenge becomes opportunity. If morning or evening prayer is already part of a parochial schedule the challenge is minimal: if not, here is a golden opportunity to do something about it.

Where morning prayer is already customary, the Office of Readings can be very easily joined to the usual celebration. The Morning Office thus becomes even more special on these days of the Easter Triduum. The General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours outlines the method of combining the Office of Readings with Morning Prayer.

If the Office of Readings is said immediately before another Hour of the Office, then the appropriate hymn for that Hour may be sung at the beginning of the Office of Readings. At the end of the Office of Readings the prayer and conclusion are omitted, and in the Hour following the introductory verse with the Glory to the Father is omitted.

- *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, 99.

The success of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, to great extent, depends upon the quality of the music ministry available. Ordinarily, for morning or evening prayer a cantor, and perhaps an instrumentalist (e.g. organist), is necessary. During the Paschal Triduum, however, accompaniment is eliminated, and so a good cantor or leader of song is essential.

The participation aid is key. The FDLC Publication, *The Easter Triduum*, is an excellent resource.

Not everything need be sung: the hymn, however, and the Gospel Cantic, if at all possible, should always be sung. One possibility is to recite the psalms in the Office of Readings and sing them at Morning Prayer.

The psalms may be sung in a variety of ways. The General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours outlines the possibilities:

III. Methods of Singing the Psalms

121. Different psalms may be sung in different ways, to bring out their spiritual function and beauty. The choice of ways is dictated by the character or length of each psalm, by the language used, whether Latin or the vernacular, and especially by the kind of celebration, whether individually or with a group or with a congregation. The use of the psalms is not simply to provide a set amount of prayer; consideration has also been given to the need for variety and to the individual character of each psalm.

122. The psalms are sung or said in one of three ways, according to the different usages sanctioned by tradition or experience: as a single unit without a break (in *directum*), or with two choirs or sections of the congregation singing alternate verses or strophes, or responsorially.

123. The antiphon for each psalm should always be recited at the beginning, as noted in nos. 113-120 above. At the end of the psalm the custom is maintained of concluding with the Glory to the Father and As it was in the beginning. This is the fitting conclusion that tradition recommends, and it gives to Old Testament prayer a quality of praise linked to a Christological and Trinitarian interpretation. The antiphon may be repeated at the end of the psalm.

124. When longer psalms occur, sections are indicated in the Psalter to keep the threefold structure of the Hour, but great care has been taken not to distort the meaning of the psalm.

It is proper to keep this division, especially in a choral celebration in Latin; the Glory to the Father is added at the end of each section.

It is permissible, however, to choose between this traditional way and either pausing between the different sections of the same psalm or reciting the whole psalm, with its antiphon, as a single unit without a break.

125. In addition, when the character of a psalm suggests it, the divisions of the strophes are indicated, in order that, especially when the psalm is sung in the vernacular, the antiphons may be repeated after each strophe; in this case the Glory to the Father need be said only at the end of the psalm.

This last stated simple method, for the congregation to repeat the antiphon between the verses like the responsorial psalm at Mass, is very useful and minimizes the need to learn a lot of new music beforehand.

The fourteen-branched candlestick was an important visual element in the former Tenebrae service. A candelabrum with seven candles can be used as a substitute in the current Office. One candle may be extinguished at the doxology of each psalm and canticle, beginning with the first psalm of the Office of Readings. The final candle is extinguished at the conclusion of the Gospel Canticle, the Canticle of Zechariah, at Morning Prayer. If the fourteen-branched candlestick is retained where one is available, the remaining candles may be extinguished during the verses of the Gospel Canticle. The use of incense to incense the altar, presider and congregation during the Gospel Canticle adds another sensory element, (GI, 261).

The *General Instruction* indicates the appropriate postures (and gestures) as follows:

263. All taking part stand:

(a) during the introduction to the Office and the introductory verses of each Hour;

(b) during the hymn;

(c) during the Gospel Canticle;

(d) during the intercessions, the Lord's Prayer and

the concluding prayer.

264. All should sit to listen to the readings, except at the Gospel.

265. While the psalms and other canticles (with their antiphons) are being said, the assembly either sits or stands, according to custom.

266. All make the sign of the cross, from forehead to breast and from left shoulder to right:

(a) at the beginning of the Hours, when God, come to my assistance is being said;

(b) at the beginning of the Gospel Canticles of Zechariah, of Mary and of Simeon.

The sign of the cross is made on the mouth at the beginning of the invitatory, at the words Lord, open my lips.

The psalm prayers, which are optional to begin with, might be appropriately omitted. If they are used, the congregation should stand, and the prayer may fittingly be preceded by Let us pray and concluded with the short conclusion, as are the Prayer over the Gifts and Prayer after Communion at Mass.

It should be noted that the General Instruction urges the use of sacred silence:

XII. Sacred Silence

201. It is a general principle that care should be taken in liturgical actions to see that "a sacred silence is observed at its proper time." (Second Vatican Council, constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 30.) An opportunity for silence should therefore be provided in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours.

202. In order to receive in our hearts the full resonance of the voice of the Holy Spirit and to unite our personal prayer more closely with the word of God and the public voice of the Church, it is permissible, as occasion offers and prudence suggests, to have an interval of silence, either after the repetition of the antiphon at the end of the psalm, in the traditional way, especially if the psalm prayer (see no.112) is to be said after the pause, or after the short or longer readings, before or after the responsory.

Care must be taken to avoid the kind of silence that would disturb the structure of the Office, or embarrass and weary those taking part.

203. In individual recitation there is greater freedom to pause in meditation on some text that moves the spirit, and the Office does not on this account lose its public character.

Concerning vesture, the following from the *General Instruction* is helpful:

255. The priest or deacon who presides at a celebration may wear a stole over the alb or surplice; a priest may also wear a cope. On greater solemnities there is nothing to prevent several priests from wearing copes or several deacons from wearing dalmatics.

And regarding the proper distribution of roles, principles already established apply in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours as well:

254. If a bishop presides, especially in the cathedral, he should be attended by his priests and by ministers, with full active participation by the people. A priest or deacon should normally preside at every celebration with the people, and ministers should also be present.

256. It is for the presiding priest or deacon, from the chair, to open the celebration with the introductory verse, to begin the Lord's Prayer, to say the concluding prayer, to greet the people, bless them and dismiss them.

257. Either the priest or a minister may give out the intercessions.

258. In the absence of a priest or deacon, the one who presides at the Office is only one among equals; he does not enter the sanctuary or greet and bless the people.

259. Those who act as readers stand in a suitable place to read either the long readings or the short readings.

The following outline and chart may be helpful in structuring the Morning Office during the Paschal Triduum:

Outline of Service

Introduction

Hymn

Office of Readings

Ant. 1 & Psalm

Silence

Ant. 2 & Psalm

Silence

Ant. 3 & Psalm

Silence

Versicle & Response

Reading I

Silence

Responsory

Reading II

Silence

Responsory

Morning Prayer

Ant. 1 & Psalm

Silence

Ant. 2 & Canticle

Silence
Ant. 3 & Psalm
Silence
Reading
Silence
Responsory
(Homily followed by Silence)
Ant. & Gospel Canticle
Intercessions
Lord's Prayer
Prayer

Concluding Rite & Dismissal (as at Mass)

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Word On Worship
Volume 10, No. 1 / Winter 1992