



# Companion Prayer Book

to the  
Liturgy of the Hours

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Catholic Book Publishing Corp.  
New Jersey

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## FOREWORD

The reform of the liturgy that came out of Vatican II replaced the old *Breviary* with a wonderful book, in tune with our times: *The Liturgy of the Hours*.<sup>1</sup> This renewal of the liturgy which concerns not only priests, but also members of religious communities and lay people, was inspired by the great tradition of the past, but also meets the needs of this day and age. It is without a doubt one of the most valuable contributions of Vatican II. However, in order for it to achieve all its goals, this profound reform requires a new way of thinking and an effective theological, liturgical and spiritual education. As a matter of fact, Vatican II expressly states that priests and all those who participate in the Divine Office should have a better knowledge of the liturgy and the Bible, especially of the psalms (SC 90).<sup>2</sup>

Using the *General Instruction (GI) of the Liturgy of the Hours* as a starting point, these pages aim at helping the reader to participate more fully in the prayer of the Church. This way, the celebration of the Hours will nourish one's

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<sup>1</sup> *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 1975/1976. It is highly recommended to read the Apostolic Constitution *Laudis Canticum* by Paul VI who promulgated the Divine Office as revised by a decree from the Vatican II Council; and also, the *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*.

<sup>2</sup> To refer to the Council's Constitution on the liturgy, we shall use SC for *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and GI for *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*.

# 1

## THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

*There are so many ways . . .*

There are so many ways to praise the Lord.

There are so many ways to celebrate the *Liturgy of the Hours*.

As soon as I arrived at the seminary, I was expected to attend Sunday Vespers. When I think about it today, I am amazed that we were given a big Roman and Gregorian Prayer Book and that we had to sing the psalms without having a word of explanation about them. On Sunday evenings, before bedtime, we used to celebrate Compline, with the unforgettable *In manus tuas, Domine* (Into your hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit). Things were different then. I still remember my joy when I started to understand the Latin words of the *Magnificat*. Later, at the theological seminary, I became interested in studying the psalms. When WWII was over, we started receiving the religious journal *Maison-Dieu* and other publications that opened up for me new vistas on the Divine Office. What a discovery that was! To this day, I miss the beauty of the Marian antiphons and of some Gregorian responses, among others, the hymns for Christmas and Holy Week. Not everything was bad before Vatican II!

## VATICAN II AND THE REFORM

The Fathers of the Council had to find a solution to a serious problem. Since many clerics had a poor understanding of Latin, they no longer considered the Office as prayer meant to sanctify the course of the day. Many priests recited the *Breviary* without giving any thought to the meaning of the Hours. Some would even recite the entire Office in the morning, including Compline. For many of them, instead of being a source of spiritual enrichment, the Office had become a chore they had to do to avoid committing a mortal sin. The directions were complicated and often incomprehensible. Why, for instance, were Vespers—an evening prayer—to be said before dinner during Lent? It made no sense.

The *Breviary* had been devised for monks. Today's priests, involved as they are in pastoral ministry, lead a very different life from that of monks. As mentioned previously, Pius V, after the Council of Trent, had made numerous changes in the Office, and Pius XII and John XXIII were the last to enact improvements. Clearly, the Fathers of the Council were faced with an enormous task, and they were far from unanimous on the subject. Subsequently, the various committees responsible for carrying out the directives that

## THE LITURGICAL CYCLES

The liturgical cycles are woven into the cycles of the universe but they do not close in on themselves; while constantly recurring, they open on to the future and the glorious return of Christ. Our liturgy follows the rhythm of life, with its daily, weekly, and annual cycles.

The first, the daily cycle, is centered on the celebration of the Eucharist. With its seven Hours, the Divine Office invites us to come to God seven times a day. Each Hour is a break in our hectic day. We can even interrupt our sleep to sanctify the night with Matins. We shall discuss in this chapter the significance of each Hour.

As mentioned above, the *Liturgy of the Hours* contributes to sanctifying the day; it is thus strongly recommended to celebrate each Hour at the designated time, in other words, to respect “the proper of time” as much as possible (GI 11).

Sunday, the day of the Resurrection of the Lord and thus a day of vital importance, begins the week. The First Day brings us to the following Sunday, which the ancient authors often referred to as the Eighth Day, or the day beyond. The day of the Lord is also the day of the Church, the day of the Eucharist. The psalms for Sundays are chosen for their messianic and paschal meaning. For