

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

by Father Gabriel Barry, OCD

I. INTRODUCTION

The final version of the reformed breviary, to be known as the Liturgy of the Hours, is now in use throughout the Church. It is opportune therefore, for those who know little or nothing about it, to say something about this official prayerbook of the Church. One of the goals of the revised breviary is to encourage its use not only among priests and religious, but among the laity as well. If this can be achieved, it will mark a return to the spirit of early Christianity and the golden age of monasticism when as many as possible among the faithful participated in the divine praises. In this era of ours, we need to establish as many bonds as we can with our Mother the Church. After the Mass and the Sacraments, there is no more firm link than this chain of gold which we call the *Divine Office*.

II. VOCAL PRAYER

Human speech is a unique phenomenon. It was given to man for the purpose of communicating with his fellows. It is a medium through which we can make known our thoughts, attitudes, and inner experiences, which otherwise would be hidden from view. The gift of speech is peculiar to men alone among the many thousand living species that fill this earth. And though it takes many forms in the various human languages, its basic structure is the same all over the globe. Every language is known to be very adaptable, very complex and yet subtle. And no primitive or undeveloped language has ever been discovered.

Speech is essential to human existence in this world. It is hard to figure out what man would be without it. For certain, he could have no access to knowledge or control of his environment without it. It is language too which provides the major basis for the mental images that are necessary in the processes of thought. And human language, though obviously limited, is nonetheless a witness to the higher category of being to which man belongs. It is a further witness to the Supreme Mind who made the mind of man to know, and Who fashioned the lips of man to express even the inmost thoughts of his heart. No musical instrument, no matter how refined, has ever surpassed the excellence of the human voice. We know all this perhaps, but tend to take it for granted. It helps to reflect occasionally, how it would be with us if all men lost the power of speech, or if we were to find ourselves in circumstances where we no longer could enjoy the wonder and glory of the human voice, talking to us or praising the Creator.

Yes! It is quite normal that man should use the unique gift of his voice to praise God. He does it in two ways: 1. By the natural use of the voice itself, singing chants or reciting prayers. To use God's gifts is one way of showing appreciation. 2. By giving external expression, especially in community worship, to the inner sentiments of service, adoration and love. This is one way that man communes with the creator, i.e., through vocal prayer. I don't propose to expound on the historical aspects of all this, interesting though it be. Suffice it to say that all of the great religions have used the human voice as a vehicle for prayer. The revealed religions of Judaism and

Christianity are no exception. Jesus Himself composed the greatest vocal prayer ever known, the Our Father. He encouraged His followers to pray both with the heart and with their lips. Only, He warned them that the efficacy of vocal prayer does not depend on its length or vehemence. “Don’t rattle off long prayers like the pagans do, who think they will be heard because they use so many words.”¹ But He obviously commends vocal prayer. And St. Paul wrote to his beloved Christians of Ephesus: “Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Express your joy in singing among yourselves psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, making music in your hearts for the ears of the Lord.”²

It is perfectly normal, then, for man to use his voice in prayer. Vocal prayer can be extemporaneous, deeply personal, or improvised on the inspiration of the moment. Or it can consist in making use of forms already fixed. Among the fixed forms most frequently used by Christians from the earliest times are the psalms of Holy Scripture. But to be genuine, all vocal prayer requires an interior act of the mind and will. Granted this interior concomitance, vocal prayer can be a worthy form of worship and a source of spiritual profit. St. Teresa gives it as her opinion that God can make it a stepping stone to the highest forms of divine union. “And when I come on such cases,” she says, “I praise God and envy such a vocal prayer.”³

From Old Testament times, vocal prayer has been used in the official worship of the people of God. In the first Book of Chronicles, we read that David organized the divine services. “He appointed Levites as ministers before the Ark of Yahweh, to commemorate, glorify and praise the God of Israel . . .” They have to be present every morning, to give glory and praise to Yahweh, and also in the evening.⁴ Here we find the source of our divine office; a daily sequence of praise and thanksgiving, consisting of chants, readings, and prayers. In this way, dawn and sunset were consecrated to God by an act of public worship. These services were maintained in the temple down to its final destruction. As we know from the Acts, the early Christians frequented them in Jerusalem. In other places, they organized services of their own. The testimony of the early times is somewhat vague but enough is known to be able to say with certainty that Christians often met at night to pray. One of the most interesting bits of evidence comes from a pagan source, Pliny the Younger, who wrote to the Emperor Trajan for some directives as to how he should handle the Christians in the remote province of Bithynia, of which he was governor. In the course of his letter, he says, “They (the Christians) are accustomed to assemble on a fixed day before sunrise, and to sing by turns a hymn to Christ as a God.” “They then depart,” he adds, “but return once more in the evening.” This was about 110 A.D.. Obviously, these Christians, even in remote Bithynia, had begun something corresponding to our lauds and vespers. In Rome, the evening service was known as lucernarium, i.e., the lighting of the lamps at even-fall. The morning rite was called matutinae laudes or morning praise. It was sung when the first streaks of dawn reddened the sky. This fact is confirmed by the evidence of Hippolytus, a Roman writer of the early Third Century.

¹Matthew 6:7-8

²Eph. 5:19-20

³Way of Perfection, Chapter 32

⁴1 Chron. 15 and 16:23-30

III. DIVINE OFFICE

It would take too long to give all the historical details concerning the evolution of the Divine Office. It must suffice to say:

1. That these early services already mentioned, though probably not following a consistent pattern, were in the main, made up of psalms, readings, hymns, probably a homily and orations.
2. That in the beginning of the 5th century, St. Ambrose introduced antiphonal psalmody in the West. This meant that the congregation was divided into two choruses or choirs. These two groups would answer one another in reciting verses of the psalms, and after every two verses, they united to chant an antiphon, i.e., a kind of refrain, usually taken from the psalm itself. This was an imitation of the classical Greek manner of choral singing.
3. That in the course of time, consecrated virgins, ascetics and monks were, as it were, delegated specially to recite the office on behalf of the rest. It was they who added the small hours. Prime and Compline too were originally morning and night prayers, privately said.
4. That in the golden age of monasticism in the West, the divine office was developed elaborately and came to be called opus Dei, i.e., the Monk's special work in relation to God. Some of the Celtic monasteries of the Carolingian domains worked out a system called Laus Perennis, unceasing praise. By taking the office in relays, they were able to ensure that some portion of the divine praise was being sung at every hour of the day and night.

In the course of the centuries, the Divine Office underwent many changes and reforms. The best known in more recent centuries is that of the Council of Trent, completed by St. Pius V in 1568. Another was undertaken by Pius X in 1910, and again by the Second Vatican Council.⁵ The work of restoration was approved by Pope Paul VI on November 7, 1970 and it was released by the Office of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship on Easter Sunday, April 11, 1971. It is a breviary which everyone, priest, religious and laity, can use with profit; the fulfillment of a hoped for ideal.

The book that we call the Breviary appears rather late on the scene. It was unknown before the 12th century and was popularized largely by the friars of St. Francis, who used a shortened version of the Roman Office to fulfill their choral obligations. The word Breviarium means a short collection of services and prayers.

So much, very briefly and inadequately for the history of the breviary. I now want to pass on to some special questions bearing on the office.

IV. UNDERSTANDING THE DIVINE OFFICE

⁵Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, number 84

The daily office can best be understood if we see it as a kind of circlet or shrine which surrounds the holy sacrifice of the Mass, like a gold casket holding a jewel. Indeed, from time immemorial, the office has been described as a Sacrifice of Praise, a prolongation of the Sacrifice of the Mass. These words refer to the work of divine praise which Jesus Christ the Word Incarnate carries out unceasingly through the lips of those who say the office. As Vatican II expresses it: “He continues His priestly work through the agency of the Church which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world.”⁶ And perhaps it may help to know that the breath which is used to produce human utterance is interpreted as a symbolic sacrifice to God, indicating a sacrifice of our entire selves. For, in the tradition of the Bible, breath (spiritus, Pneuma, Ruah) is the principle of life and of vital action in man. This concept of “spirit” or “breathing,” is exceedingly rich and lovely, derived from the theology of the Old Testament. The air that gives things life and motion is associated with God who is the source of all life. And when the office is said in common, the breath of human beings wings its way, in service and in praise, to the mysterious Breathing of the Creator, Who in the beginning breathed on man and made him a living being.⁷

V. CONSECRATION OF TIME

The next point to note concerning the Divine Office is that it is meant to sanctify or consecrate time. The notion of time is not an easy one to grasp, though in practice we all know what it is. It is that portion of our total existence which is passed here below in this world amid changing scenes and transitory things. It is our testing period, in the course of which we make a deliberate and entirely free choice in favor of God or against Him. Time then is the prelude or antechamber to eternity. It is supremely important that we use it in the right way. This is what St. Paul calls “redeeming the time.”⁸ This means claiming it back for God and His service, making the best possible use of it. This is in one of the goals of the Divine Office, to provide a framework for our day; to dedicate to God both the hours of time and the powers of the mind, even when they are engaged in other human activities. It provides the motivation and the means of elevating to a higher and more spiritual plane all we think and do, by linking up our activities to the Mass and orienting them to God. The office brings us back constantly to the fountainhead of all life that comes to us in the Holy Sacrifice, the material for which, namely bread and wine, is the product of human activity. In that way, every moment becomes a hymn of praise.

The Divine Office revolves round three cycles of time. In the first cycle of the Divine Office, there are the hours of the day: the sun rising, ascending, waning and setting. Most of our pagan forefathers actually worshipped the sun or moon as God. The Bible firmly repudiates this notion, but it is certainly not indifferent to the loveliness and symbolism of light, which is regarded as the domain of God Himself. This opens up to us yet another biblical theme, that of light and darkness. Christ, we recall, referred to Himself as the Light of the World; those who followed Him were “children of the Light,” walking in freedom, joy and love.

⁶Constitution on the Liturgy, #83

⁷Genesis 2:7

⁸Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5

The Divine Office exploits this concept in many ways. Perhaps some of its symbolism is now lost on us, accustomed as we are to artificial light in such abundance. But we should not ignore the beauty and wonder of God's own creation, and we should also remember that, according to the Bible, the first creative act of God was to make light. "Let there be light, and the light was made. And God saw that light was good."⁹

This is one theme that we find in all the hours of the office, Lauds is morning-praise; said ideally, when the dawning light struggles to conquer the dark, a type of the age-old struggle in which the light of truth overcomes the darkness of error. "The day-spring from on high is visiting us."¹⁰ Christ is the true Rising Sun. And so on through the other hours, the liturgy refers to the passing of the daylight, until we come to Vespers (evensong) which is the other pivot of the Divine Office. The vespers hour is dedicated to the lighting of the evening lamps, for they too are a symbol of Christ, the Evening Star, rising to be a guide and a solace in a world of darkness.

The second cycle of the office is concerned with the sanctification of the week. When the sacred writer was drawing up laws for the chosen people, he pointed to the divine work of Creation as the example men should follow in determining the rhythm of their lives. God worked for six days and then He rested. This instituted a new division of time into periods of seven days.

The Divine Office takes account of this too and gives it a fuller meaning by constituting the first day of the week the Lord's Day. In English, the name Sunday commemorates the Sun. However, it is not entirely inappropriate. It recalls both the source of natural light and the Sun of Justice, Christ, rising from the tomb.

The recitation of the psalms is the bond which unites the weekly theme of creation, making an organic whole of the prayers, hymns, canticles and reading. Up to our times, the ideal was to recite the entire Psalter once a week. In the new revision, it is spread over a month. But new material is being added, in the shape of canticles from the Old and New Testaments, which hitherto have not been featured in the Divine Office. These should give the Church's daily prayer a new richness and variety.

The third cycle of the Divine Office covers the year and its seasons. Easter is the center of the Church's year, and every Sunday is a commemoration of the Lord's resurrection. The yearly cycle of the breviary was designed to cover a systematic reading of almost the entire Bible, together with Advent. Season after season, we are presented with some aspect of the history of salvation, as made manifest in the life, death and glorification of Jesus. This series of biblical readings has been revised. Appropriate commentaries from the Fathers have been added. These saintly theologians and spiritual guides have a special standing in the magisterium of the Church. Moreover, numbered among them are some of the most refined and noblest minds the Church has produced.

Into this cycle which unfolds the history of salvation, we insert the feasts of Our Lady and the saints. Christ is the vine, they are the branches in whom the life of the vine flows without

⁹Genesis 1:3-4

¹⁰Luke 1:78

hindrance. They are examples of how we should imitate Christ and allow His grace to be effective in us. When we view the feasts of the saints against the background of the liturgical year, every feast comes alive and is itself a lesser manifestation of the Christ-life, pulsating in the Church. On the other hand, an excessive number of saints' feast days can obscure the central mysteries of our redemption. That is why, in the revised calendar, the list has been shortened, and many are optional commemorations.

VI. THE PSALMS

The Divine Office is made up of diverse materials; psalms, antiphons, readings, responses, hymns, versicles and prayers. The psalms are the core of the office, and I would like to comment on them. What I have to say here is necessarily limited, only an outline, in fact. But I should hope that it will be of some help in understanding the Divine Office and also stimulate further reading and meditation.

The psalms are a collection of 150 sacred songs used initially by the children of Israel in their public worship and private devotions. Jewish tradition attribute many of them to David. "the sweet singer of Israel," or to the groups of musicians who took care of the worship in the temple.¹¹ It is doubtful if any of the psalms as we now have them, go so far back, but there is no question that the psalm category (or genre) is indeed very old and very likely was established by David, if he did not actually initiate them. Israel preserved these sacred poems through all the vicissitudes of her history. They are a lyrical summary of the teaching of the prophets and of the spiritual and human history of the chosen people.

The psalms are poetry, sacred poetry, expressing the emotions and aspirations of the writer, but directed to God, and inspired by the thought of God. The very word "psalm" (in Hebrew *Mizmor*) suggests a musical instrument which the singer used to accompany his song. The psalms were written in the manner of all Hebrew poetry, in a balanced symmetry of form and sense. They can be scanned in the type of rhythm which Fr. Gerard M. Hopkins revitalized in our times, the Sprung rhythm, bearing a certain resemblance to the rhythms of nature, like the ebb and flow of the tide, or a bird in flight, or the wind blowing over a field of grain. Ancient Hebrew poetry has neither meter nor rhyme, but develops on a certain balance or contrast of thoughts. A statement is made, then repeated in a modified fashion, in the next line. In other words, in Hebrew poetry, ideas rhyme, not words. The verses generally contain two clauses that "respond" or "contrast." A special rhythmic cadence joins the two, with an interval of silence in between. This is called parallelism. It is admirably designed for alternating chanting and also helps to waft the mind to God by its soothing rhythms. As to the thought-structure of a psalm, it is quite unlike what we are accustomed to in western poetry. The psalmist does not reason in our sense of the word. But he overwhelms us with a power of images and ideas that repeat themselves, chase one another and even clash, after the manner of antithesis. "The psalmist teaches, not by explaining, but by putting his own words on our lips."¹² The psalms are really a series of acclamations, of love or dislike, of suffering or rejoicing, of faith or hope. In one, the psalmist sings out his trust or love for Yahweh. In another, he is depressed and overcome by sorrow. In a third, he vehemently begs

¹¹2 Samuel 23:1; 1 Chronicles 15 and 16

¹²*The Psalms*, Grail version, Introduction p. 5

God to come to his aid, and so on. “The psalms are the outpourings of a profoundly religious man. They express his faith and trust in God, his needs, fears and perplexities in the face of life’s baffling problems, his admiration for God’s power and the wonderful things He has done in nature and among His chosen people. Without an understanding of the Psalter, it would be impossible to appreciate the inner life of the Church of Promise.”¹³

Since the psalms were written as poetry, this constitutes a problem for the translator. It has been said that the one who undertakes to translate great poetry into another language must himself be a great poet in both. It is doubtful if the cadences and vigor of Hebrew poetry can ever be adequately rendered into English or indeed any language. However, we can be assured that there are good translations, such as the Grail version, already footnoted, and the one in use in the Revised Version of the English Bible. These bring out the essential quality of the psalms, if not all the power of the originals.

The central thought of all the psalms is that God alone is, that nothing else counts in comparison with Him. God reigns supreme, pervades all, knows all, preserves all, loves all. God is at the heart of all things, and in Him, all things are explained.

The psalms are prayers. They draw, even compel, the soul to ascent to God, and to stay in His presence all day long. They express strong sentiments of desire and love; the soul is like the deer that yearns for the fountain of water, or like the dry parched desert-land, longing for rain, or like the watchman waiting for the dawn, etc., etc.. The psalms initiate us into prayer. Contrition, or amendment of life, is one of the first steps and the psalms are replete with the wailing of a soul in pain for its sins and negligence. Self-knowledge brings us to a realization of human misery. There is a stunning contrast between God’s transcendent goodness and our human meanness. But we can also count on God’s loving-kindness and forgiveness, only we must begin by making an open confession of all our guilt. This is what we find in the penitential psalms.

All men have some experience of being disheartened and crushed. They go through dark and evil days, in exile from home and family, deserted by others whom they had thought to be friends, disappointed in hopes. Even God would seem to have turned against them. The psalms grasp and reveal the spirit of this experience. They show us not so much a solution to the problem of suffering as the frame of mind we must adopt when “clouds of adversity darken and frown.” Their supreme value is the emphasis they lay on God as the final solution.

VII. SPIRITUAL VALUE OF THE PSALMS

The psalms, then, are the sacred poetry of the Old Testament in which God inspired the feelings that His children ought to have toward Him and the words they ought to use when speaking to Him. They were recited by Jesus Himself, by the Virgin Mary, the apostles and the early martyrs. The Christian Church has adopted them unchanged for the official prayer. Unchanged are the cries of praise, entreaty and thanksgiving wrung from the psalmists by events of their own times and by their personal experiences. Yet they have a universal note, as all great literature has, because they express the attitude that every man should have towards God. Unchanged too are

¹³Little: *Sacrifice of Praise*, p. 38

the words, but a great enrichment of sense is given them, for in the New Covenant, the faithful Christian praises and thanks God for the Incarnation, for redeeming him by the death of Christ, for giving him fresh hope by the resurrection, for sending the Holy Spirit to be our guide.¹⁴

All those reasons compel us, as it were, to use the psalms in our prayer. By their means, we can go through the whole scale of man's experiences and emotions and attitudes in relation to God, love, sorrow, joy, trust, patient waiting, worship, repentance, petition and so on. The psalms express them all. They also show us God in relation to His chosen people, intimate in their lives, working in them by a presence and an action which is at once deep, vivid, personal and tender. He cares for His people with a fatherly care; He thinks about every one of them. He is as strong as a fortress or a tower in time of danger, He is firm like a rock in times of doubt; He is a shield and buckler in time of assault. He hears the sighs of those in prison; He consoles the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds. It is He Who controls the forces of nature. He makes the sun to rise and set; it is He Who brings the change of the seasons. It is He Who spreads the clouds over the heavens and causes the rains to fall. He it is Who makes the rivers to flow down from the mountains and the seas to toss their waves. He causes the thunder to roll and the lightning to flash. The flowers of the spring and the wheat and grapes of the harvest are the work of His hands.

For us Christians, the psalms mirror forth Christ. Our Lord told His apostles on the first Easter evening that the psalms contained reference to Him.¹⁵ The truth is that He is the fulfillment of all that we find in the psalms. All that the psalms had said about Yahweh finds its expression and accomplishment in Christ. "It is Jesus, the Son of David, and the Son of God Who judges the world in His death, Who saves it in His resurrection, Who has become man among us and has made the Father known to us." Of Him the psalms speak. The appeal of the just man who suffers persecution, the cry of the suffering servant who endures patiently the outrages of His enemies, these are more fittingly spoken by Christ than any of the prophets. His resurrection gives more meaning to mankind's song of delivery and thanksgiving than the Passover of Israel. The voice of the psalmist is the voice of Christ.¹⁶ That is why the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit has used the psalms in her liturgy right from the beginning. The book of psalms, short though it may be, is an inexhaustible treasury of prayer, worship and fulfillment.

Certain psalms, at first sight, seem to have little appeal for modern man. These are the imprecatory psalms, in which the psalmist calls down God's vengeance upon his enemies. Other psalms invoke God's intervention "because of the psalmist's uprightness and innocence." It may seem that others again are dated because they speak of war. It would take far too long to enter into a theological explanation of this matter. Since it seems to be the policy of the new Breviary to omit the more impassioned verses in which the psalmist inveighs against his foes, we can safely do the same. But while doing this, we ought not to close our eyes to the fact that the Lord Himself uttered terrible denunciations against those whose hearts were hardened by pride and self-love.¹⁷ Furthermore, we should always ask ourselves what it is that the psalmist loves or hates? We will find that the choice is between the Kingdom of Grace and the Kingdom of evil.

¹⁴The Jerusalem Bible. p. 785, adapted

¹⁵Luke 24:44

¹⁶Grail Version, Introduction, p. 7

¹⁷Matthew 23:23-36

True, the Old Testament man identified himself with God's side in a manner that for us is rather disconcerting; but then, if the same psalmist were to come back, he might well chide us for our indifference to evil, disguised as tolerance and "openness." Certain it is that we often condone lax moral standards of one kind or another out of human respect. Our Lord said that the one who leads others astray by bad example should be tied to a mill-stone and thrown into the ocean. And in another place He says that the one who is ashamed to proclaim Him before men will receive a like treatment on the last day; "I will be ashamed of him."

As regards the "battling psalms," it is curious that these were the very ones that most attracted the early monks and nuns. They of course transposed the battles onto the spiritual level: "against organizations and powers that are spiritual, the power that controls this world of darkness and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil."¹⁸ That kind of war will never cease in this world, neither in the life of the Christian nor of the whole people of God. And the psalms are an admirable battle-book!

VIII. CONCLUSION

I would like to close all these reflections by presenting a brief summary. I will, therefore, list a number of points:

1. Jesus Christ bequeathed His mission and His riches to the Church, which is His Mystical Body. She continues His work of praising and worshipping the Father, and of interceding for the salvation of mankind. This she does not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also by praying the Divine Office. The office is the voice of the Bride of Christ.

2. In addition, mankind is the mediator with God for all inanimate and irrational nature. Man himself is the world in brief - a microcosm; and he lends to the rest of creation, a voice, an understanding and heart full of love. Christ wills that every creature should come to life, as it were, and burst into praise on the lips of those who say the Divine Office. Man is the mediator of all lesser creation, and Christ is mediator for all men.

3. The Divine Office is truly an encounter with Christ. We meet Him in the praying community. We meet Him in the collects, readings and psalms. The Incarnation of the Word marks the greatest act of God's approach to us; the transformation of the soul marks the final stage. The great works of God in history are enacted all over again, first on the level of Church, then of the individual soul. It is the same God acting in the same way, though in different circumstances. The Divine Office is one of man's responses to God, after God had first called him to Grace and Glory.

4. Because the Divine Office is the public official prayer of the Church, it is also a source of piety and nourishment for personal prayer. Therefore, all who take part in it should attune their minds to their voices when praying it. And one of the most important steps in this direction is to improve our understanding of the psalms.¹⁹

¹⁸Ephesians 6:12

¹⁹Constitution on the Liturgy, Chapter IV

5. The Divine Office is an act of the three theological virtues. (a) It is a true profession of faith in God our Maker. The acts of worship, reverence, thanksgiving and joy all proceed from faith. (b) It contains the homage of hope. Relying on the merits of Christ, we make our requests and send them before the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (c) Lastly, it is a heartfelt expression of love. Praise is essentially love. The admiration, delight and sorrow of the psalms form a fitting vehicle of these basic virtues.

6. The Divine Office is well named the “sacrifice of praise.” At times, this may be literally true when small annoyances jar upon us. To recite the office well and fittingly is not an easy thing. We may not agree with the tone, the pitch or the speed of the choir. Others may intrude on us by untimely movements, and soon these petty annoyances are difficult to eliminate, but if properly borne, they add fresh luster and beauty to our praise. We must learn to pray in sorrow as well as in consolation; to follow Christ not only to Tabor, but also to the Garden of Olives. In this way we learn to be truly unselfish in our prayer.

7. What is to be said to those who claim they get nothing out of the Divine Office? If they mean that they get no emotional uplift, that it doesn’t “turn them on,” then I think they have to learn that neither the office nor the Mass is intended for that purpose. Of course feeling and emotions have a place in prayer; certainly they have. But we can be truly praying even if we don’t feel very fervent or devout. And probably one of the hardest lessons we all have to learn in our times is that we must not hanker after sensible or emotional consolation. God gives it, blessed be His name. If He withholds it, may He be blessed too. Far more important is the depth of conviction, the generosity, the trust, the faith, and steadfastness that goes beyond the self-centered prayer that seems only to be concerned with “feeling good.” In a recent pastoral, Archbishop McGucken pointed out that few things have led to such confusion in the liturgy as the idea that we must “get something out of it.” Of course we must, but it ought not to be judged by our own subjective feelings. I think it is true to say that if we deferred prayer until “we felt like it,” then we would hardly ever pray at all. This topic, I realize, is a big one and cannot be handled adequately in a few minutes like this, but it is well to note that all creditable spiritual directors (St. John of the Cross; St. Teresa, etc.) are unanimous that a selfish reaching out after this kind of devotion minimizes faith and is a serious obstacle to spiritual maturity. It can also lead to great instability, not to mention worse aberrations.

8. What is to be said about our external attitudes and posture during the Divine Office? In other words, where have all the rubrics gone? Briefly, a great number of them have been set aside as obsolete. Rubrics are simply directives as to how an act of worship should be performed in a dignified manner. A goodly number of the older rubrics reflected an age and a culture quite different from ours. They no longer possess much meaning, and we rightly have abandoned them. The present day tendency is to pray with the maximum simplicity. It can be done sitting or standing as well as kneeling. However, I think most of us regret the lack of dignity and reverence that has occasionally crept into our public services. Almost anything goes! This, of course, is clean contrary to the spirit of worship, it is a violation of one of the basics of prayer which calls for reverence and awe and “filial fear” in the presence of our Lord and God. This is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, it should be noted.

Again, this topic is more complex than a short answer would seem to imply; but I would definitely say that the Divine Office should be performed with a sense of quiet dignity. “He is the living God and in His sight we stand.” All the psalms call for this spirit of reverence which seems to stand at the very foundations of the idea of holiness.

9. One of the chief aims of the early Christians and the first monks was to pray without ceasing. To achieve this, they used the Psalter and used it so constantly that, in the words of one who knew them, “they did not seem so much to be reciting the psalms as to be re-living them.” They knew them so well that it sounded as if they were being uttered for the first time.²⁰ But the office requires more than the mere recitation of words. It calls for an assimilation, as it were, of the spirit of the psalms. They must nourish the life of prayer within us, and our praise must be vitalized by an intimate apprehension of the Sacred Word. Our Christian forefathers did this in a manner that deserves mention. At the end of each psalm, there was a pause for silent prayer. Then this pause was usually concluded by a collect, a “summing up,” based on the main theme of the psalm. Here is one such Psalter-collect; inspired by Psalm 150: “you who are the loveliest melody of our choir, you who have commanded that the songs of our hearts should be rendered sometimes by wind instruments, sometimes by strings; (nunc flatibus nunc fidibus); grant that while we are singing with this spiritual desire, we may be admitted among everlasting choirs, to praise you for ever and ever.”²¹

IX. BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Please refer to Article 5 of the OCDS Rule.
2. Vatican II: *Constitution on the Liturgy*, Chapter IV, on the Divine Office.
3. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*: Articles on the Divine Office and Breviary.
4. A good translation of the Psalms: I recommend the *Grail Version* (Deus Books).
5. A good commentary on the Psalms. There are many available now, e.g. *Jerome Commentary* by Roland Murphy O. Carm. is very good. However, for personal use, there are more practical books available:
 - a. *How to Pray the Psalms*, Garrone (Fides).
 - b. *The Psalms are our Prayers*, Gelin (Liturgical Press).
 - c. *Praying the Psalms*, Thomas Merton.
 - d. *The Psalms as Christian Prayer*, Worden (Newman).
6. *Bread in the Wilderness*, Thomas Merton.
7. Some small introduction to the Fathers. There are not very many of these, but I recommend *A Treasury of Early Christianity*, by Anne Fremantle (Mentor).
8. *The Divine Office, Making Holy the Day*, Charles E. Miller.
9. *Liturgy of the Hours*: Roguet O.P. (Liturgical Press - 1971) and *Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours*, the Breviary published by The Catholic Book Publishing Company.
10. For general instruction, a book by Vilma G. Little, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, dated (Longmans).

²⁰Cf. Bouyer: *liturgical Piety*, p. 229

²¹Ibid, p. 239

11. Finally, there is an excellent chapter in Marmion's book, *Christ, The Ideal Monk*; and another in *Fundamentals of the Liturgy* by John H. Miller (Fides). This contains an excellent biography. Also, portions from two books by Louis Bouyer: *Liturgical Piety* (Notre Dame) and *Rite and Man* (Notre Dame).

