

Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Liturgy of the Hours¹

1. Vatican II on the Liturgy of the Hours

The Prayer of Jesus the Priest

Jesus Christ, High Priest of the New and Eternal Covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. *He attaches to himself the entire community of mankind and has them join him in singing his divine song of praise. For he continues his priestly work through his Church.* The Church, by celebrating the Eucharist and by other means, *especially by the celebration of the divine office*, is ceaselessly engaged in *praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the entire world.* (Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* no. 83)

1. Jesus' Own Hymn of Praise: distinctly "priestly" in character
2. A Twofold Prayer of (a) Praise of God and (b) Intercession for the World

The Voice of the Bride to Christ the Bridegroom

The divine office, in keeping with ancient Christian tradition, is so devised that *the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God.* Therefore, when this wonderful song of praise is correctly celebrated by priests and others deputed to it by the Church, or by the faithful praying together with a priest in the approved form, then *it is truly the voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom.* It is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to the Father. Hence all who take part in the divine office are *not only performing a duty for the Church, they are also sharing in what is the greatest honor for Christ's Bride;* for by offering these praises to God they are standing before God's throne in the name of the Church, their Mother. (Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* no.84)

1. Sanctification of Time: "the purpose of the office is to sanctify the day" (SC no. 88).
2. The Voice of the Bride addressed to Her Bridegroom
3. Not just a duty, but the "greatest honor" for Christ's Bride

The Liturgy of the Hours, the Bible, and the Psalms

The divine office, because it is the public prayer of the Church, is a source of piety and a nourishment for personal prayer. For this reason, priests and others who take part in the divine office are earnestly exhorted in the Lord to attune their minds to their voices when praying it. *To achieve this more fully, they should take steps to improve their understanding of the liturgy and of the Bible, especially of the psalms.* (Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* no. 90)

1. Both public prayer of the Church and nourishment for personal prayer.
2. Importance of both "mind" and "voice" being attuned when praying it.
3. How to do this? Deeper understanding of (a) the liturgy and (b) the Bible, esp. Psalms

¹ See Robert Taft, S.J., *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986); C. W. Dugmore, *The Influence of the Synagogue upon the Divine Office* (new ed; London: Faith Press, 1964).

2. The Jewish Roots of the Liturgy of the Hours

The “Continual Offering” (Hebrew *Tamid*) in the Old Testament

Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar: *two lambs a year old day by day continually. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer in the evening; and with the first lamb a tenth measure of fine flour... and a fourth of a hin of wine for a libation. And the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, and shall offer with it a bread-offering and its libation, as in the morning, for a pleasing odor, and offering by fire to the LORD. It shall be a continual burnt offering (Hebrew *tamid olah*) throughout your generations at the door of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak there to you.* (Exodus 29:38-43; cf. Exod 28:1-8)

The Sanctification of Time in the Psalms

But I call upon God; and the LORD will save me. *Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he will hear my voice.* (Psalm 51:16-17)

The Jewish Hours of Prayer during the Babylonian Exile

[Daniel] went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and *he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously....*(Daniel 6:10)

The Jewish Apostles and Morning Prayer (3rd Hour)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place... But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem... give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only *the third hour of the day* [=9:00am] (Acts 2:1, 14-15).

The Jewish Apostles and Midday Prayer (6th Hour)

The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, *Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour* [=12:00pm] And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth... (Acts 10:9-11)

The Jewish Apostles and Evening Prayer (9th Hour)

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour [=3:00p.m.] And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms... (Acts 3:1-3)

Prayer as the “Evening Sacrifice”

I call upon you, O LORD; make haste to me!

Give ear to my voice, when I call to you!

Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,

and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice. (Psalm 141:1-2)

3. The Liturgy of the Hours and the Psalms

The Psalms or “Praises” (Hebrew *Tehillim*) in Jewish Tradition

The 5 Books of the Torah

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

The 5 Books of the Psalter

Book 1 (Psalms 1-41)

Book 2 (Psalms 42-72)

Book 3 (Psalms 73-89)

Book 4 (Psalms 90-106)

Book 5 (Psalms 107-150)

The Psalms as the *Torah* of King David

*King David went in and sat before the LORD, and said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house..? You have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come, and have shown me a law for humankind (Hebrew *torah ha adam*)!"* (2 Samuel 7:15-19)

The Psalms: Sung Daily with the Perpetual Sacrifice by Levites in the Temple

*This was the singing which the Levites used to sing in the Temple: On the first day they sang “The earth is the Lord’s...” (Psalm 24); on the second day “Great is the Lord and highly to be praised...” (Psalm 48); on the third day “God stands in the congregation of God...” (Psalm 82); on the fourth day “O Lord God to whom vengeance belongeth...” (Psalm 94); on the fifth day “Sing we merrily unto God our strength...” (Psalm 81); on the sixth day “The Lord is king...!” (Psalm 93). On the Sabbath “...A Song for the Sabbath Day” (Psalm 92); a Psalm for the time that is to come, for the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in the everlasting. (Mishnah, *Tamid* 7:4; translation Herbert Danby)*

The *Catechism* on the Psalms as the Prayers of the Jewish People

From the time of David to the coming of the Messiah texts appearing in these sacred books show a deepening in prayer for oneself and in prayer for others. Thus the psalms were gradually collected into the five books of the Psalter (or “Praises”), *the masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament*. The Psalms both nourished and expressed the prayer of the People of God gathered during the great feasts at Jerusalem and each Sabbath in the synagogues. *Their prayer is inseparably personal and communal; it concerns both those who are praying and all men*. The Psalms arose from the communities of the Holy Land and the Diaspora, but embrace all creation. Their prayer recalls the saving events of the past, yet extends into the future, even to the end of history; it commemorates the promises God has already kept, and awaits the Messiah who will fulfill them definitively. *Prayed by Christ and fulfilled in him, the Psalms remain essential to the prayer of the Church.* (CCC 2585-86)

The *Catechism* on How Jesus Learned to Pray

The Son of God who became Son of the Virgin also learned to pray according to his human heart. *He learns the formulas of prayer from his mother, who kept in her heart and meditated upon all the "great things" done by the Almighty. He learns to pray in the words and rhythms of the prayer of his people, in the synagogue at Nazareth and the Temple at Jerusalem.* (CCC 2599)

The Catechism on Psalms as the Prayer of All Peoples

The Psalter is the book in which The Word of God becomes man's prayer. In other books of the Old Testament, "the words proclaim [God's] works and bring to light the mystery they contain." [Wit] the words of the Psalmist... the same Spirit inspires both God's work and man's response. Christ will unite the two. In him, the psalms continue to teach us how to pray. The Psalter's many forms of prayer take shape both in the liturgy of the Temple and in the human heart. Whether hymns or prayers of lamentation or thanksgiving, whether individual or communal, whether royal chants, songs of pilgrimage or wisdom-meditations, the Psalms are a mirror of God's marvelous deeds in the history of his people, as well as reflections of the human experiences of the Psalmist. Though a given psalm may reflect an event of the past, it still possesses such direct simplicity that it can be prayed in truth by men of all times and conditions. (CCC 2587-88)

4. The Liturgy of the Hours and the Passion of Christ

The Passion and Death of Jesus, the *Tamid*, and the Psalter

And they crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And *it was the third hour* [9:00a.m.] *when they crucified him...* (Mark 15:22-27)

And when the sixth hour had come, *there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour* [3:00p.m.]. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" *which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* ...And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. (Mark 15:33-38)

Jesus Prays the Psalms in His Dying Breath

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?... Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help... I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; thou dost lay me in the dust of death. Yea, dogs are round about me; a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet --I can count all my bones --they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots. But thou, O LORD, be not far off! O thou my help, hasten to my aid!... For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. From thee comes my praise in the great congregation... The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD!... All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. (Psalm 22:1-27)

The Catechism on Jesus' Final Prayer

When the hour had come for him to fulfill the Father's plan of love, Jesus allows a glimpse of the boundless depth of his filial prayer, not only before he freely delivered himself up ("Abba . . . not my will, but yours."), *but even in his last words on the Cross, where prayer and the gift of self are but one...* (CCC 2605)

The Catechism on Jesus' Final Prayer

All the troubles, for all time, of humanity enslaved by sin and death, all the petitions and intercessions of salvation history are summed up in this cry of the incarnate Word. Here the Father accepts them and, beyond all hope, answers them by raising his Son. Thus is fulfilled and brought to completion the drama of prayer in the economy of creation and salvation. The Psalter gives us the key to prayer in Christ. In the "today" of the Resurrection the Father says: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." (CCC 2606)

What the Jews Were Praying for When Jesus Was Crucified?

1. *Blessed are You, Lord our God and God of our fathers... who brings a Redeemer to their childrens' children for your Name's sake out of love...*

6. *Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned; pardon us, our King, for we have transgressed.* For you forgive and pardon. Blessed are You, Lord, gracious, rich in forgiveness.

7. *Heal us, O Lord, and we shall all be healed, save us, and we shall be saved...* Blessed are you, Lord, who heals the sick of your people Israel.

15. *Cause the shoot of David to shoot forth quickly, and raise up his horn by your salvation (Hebrew yeshu 'a). For we wait on your salvation (Hebrew yeshu 'a) all the day.* Blessed are you, Lord, who causes the horn of salvation to shoot forth.

16. *Bring back the worship into the Holy of Holies of your house and accept in love and pleasure the sacrifices of Israel and her prayer.* And may the worship offered by Israel your people be pleasing to you always... Blessed are you, Lord, who causes your presence (Hebrew shekinah) to return to Zion. (trans. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People*, 2:456-59).

The Mystery of the Liturgy of the Hours

The excellence of Christian prayer lies in this, that it shares in the very love of the only-begotten Son for the Father and in that prayer which the son put into words in his earthly life and which still continues unceasingly in the name of the whole human race and for its salvation, throughout the universal Church and in all its members. (General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours, 1.7)