

THE LITTLE BOOK
OF HOURS

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Praying with the Community of Jesus

REVISED EDITION



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The Little Book of Hours, Revised Edition

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CONTENTS

Introduction

vii

Prayer: Morning, Midday, and Vespers

Week 1

1

Week 2

61

Week 3

121

Week 4

181

Prayer: Compline

241

Prayers for Various Occasions

247

Notes

255

We gratefully acknowledge the
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permission to use the several volumes
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of *The Little Book of Hours*. We also
wish to thank Br. Benedict Young, cJ,
for the many hours he spent in
compiling *The Little Book of Hours*.

INTRODUCTION

You hold this *Little Book of Hours* in your hands because, like those of us who live here at the Community of Jesus, you believe that praying has something to do with living. It has a lot to do with living, as a matter of fact. In prayer we attend to the things about life that are of greatest importance to us—to the “one thing that is needful,” as Jesus said to Martha—in other words, to the *One* whom we need above all others.

Prayer is first and foremost about relationship, our relationship with God and our relationship with one another in the Body of Christ. These relationships fill our lives with meaning and purpose. Prayer, then, is not so much an exercise of piety as it is an exchange of love.

The Community of Jesus is an ecumenical community in the Benedictine monastic tradition. As such, we come from diverse backgrounds and we represent a variety of vocations. Some of us are celibate sisters or brothers; some are married; some are single. Our homes are filled with young and old alike. But, within our diversity we find a single purpose—seeking to live our lives to

the glory of God—and for this reason we have come together to live and to pray.

This is because we believe that the principal values espoused by monasticism through the centuries can be embraced in some way by every Christian. St Benedict may have written his “rule” for monastic living in the sixth century (by then there had already lived many generations of men and women monastics), but his exhortations still ring true in the twenty-first: Seek to love God above all else; listen intently to the Word of God so that it might direct and shape your life; find the presence of Christ in all whom you meet; weave together your work and prayer into a daily offering of praise to God. As we say in our own *Rule of Life for the Community of Jesus*:

God’s call is pure gift, and our grateful response, made possible by his grace, is the complete offering of our lives to him and to his service. . . . It is our joyful and solemn “yes” to this call that has brought us from our various backgrounds to form a united body of believers who seek to express a sacred vocation in the ordinary routines of daily life together.

In our community, we think of prayer as our common heartbeat, that rhythmic and unceasing exchange of receiving and giving that sustains our lives. “Pray without ceasing,” wrote the apostle Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:17). But for prayer to happen at *all* times, it must happen at *some* time. As Karl Rahner, the great Catholic theologian, wrote: “I now see clearly that, if there is any path at all on which I can approach [God], it must lead through the middle of my ordinary daily life.” And so, like countless monastic communities before us, we draw upon an ancient tradition of the church, sometimes called the Liturgy of the Hours, that punctuates the day with prayer at certain times: morning, noon, evening, and night.

Morning Prayer or *Lauds* (Latin for “praise”) is the first prayer of the day, offering a new song of praise to the glory of God. *Midday* prayer speaks for itself. It is brief and concise, for it is offered in the midst of the busy day, reminding us that God alone is the one who gives meaning to our labors. *Evening Prayer* or *Vespers* (Latin for “evening star”) is a prayer of thanksgiving as we look back on the day, giving thought to our own shortcomings and, above all, remembering God’s ample blessings. Lastly, *Compline* (from the Latin for “complete” or

“finished”) closes the day, as we commend ourselves to God’s care through the night.

At these four “hours” of each day—early in the morning, at noon-time, at the close of the work-day, before retiring—we make the brief walk to the Church of the Transfiguration, which stands at the center of our community, we vest in white alb and pectoral cross (symbols of our monastic vows), and we take our designated seat in choir. There we chant the psalms, listen to the readings, silently meditate upon what we have heard, and make our intercessions for the needs of others.

The Little Book of Hours is a shortened version of our community’s prayer book, and all of its elements are drawn from the actual prayers that we make each day. A brief look at the table of contents will show you that Lauds, Midday, and Vespers are structured in a four-week cycle, while Compline remains the same every day (as the “bedtime” hour it might eventually be prayed from memory).

It may be helpful to consider each “hour” as a sacred dialogue with God which, like any dialogue, is made up of times to speak and times to listen. In the first segment, after gathering our thoughts and quieting our minds, we begin to speak. Through introductory

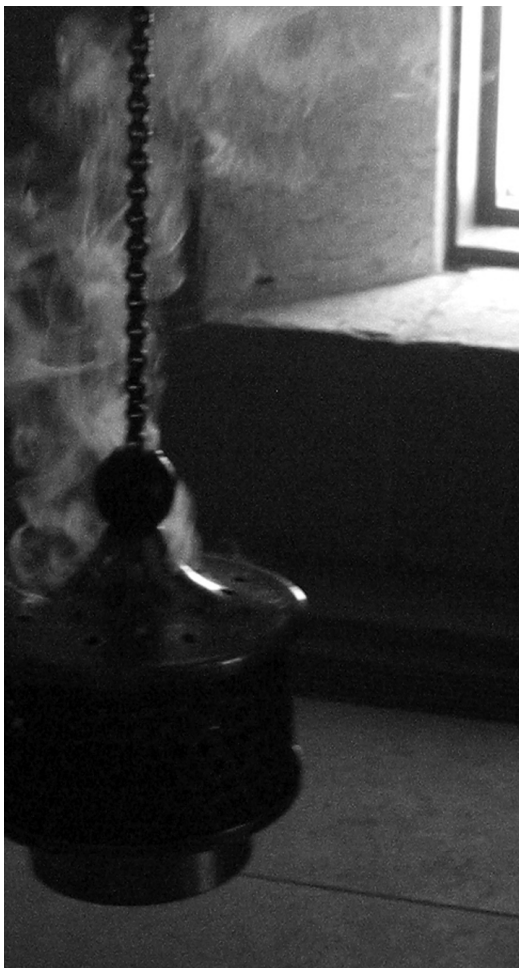
sentences, an opening prayer, and a psalm, we address God. The second segment is a time to listen. It consists of a reading (though not at Midday—remember, this is just a quick stop in the day) and a space for reflection. This period of silence might be a good time to ponder certain questions: What word or phrase seems to “light up” from this reading? What does God seem to be saying *to me* through this word? What would I say to God in response? This leads to the final segment, when once again we speak, through closing prayers (the Appendix includes additional prayers for various needs and occasions), through the Lord’s Prayer, and through asking God’s blessing upon ourselves and our loved ones.

Finally, though the “Liturgy of the Hours” at the Community of Jesus is essentially communal, *The Little Book of Hours* has been designed so that it can be used either in small groups—certain lines have been italicized for use as responses—or in private prayer. In either case, whether alone or with others, consider saying these prayers aloud, so that you can both speak and listen to the words. (Once upon a time, all reading meant reading out loud, for this very reason.) Doing so may help to remind you that not only are you praying “with the Community of Jesus,” but

also you are actually taking part in a much larger and eternal conversation.

When we gather each day in our church we also hope to be reminded of this abiding truth. In our prayer we pay attention as the Holy Spirit breathes God's message of grace to us, and we breathe back our own words and songs of gratitude and praise. We call out to the heart of God, and we listen to the word of God as it has been given through the centuries—through the Scriptures, through psalms and canticles, through some of the church's great teachers and writers. When we pray, we add our own voices to this ceaseless chorus, taking our part in the song that has been sung since creation began. As one Orthodox theologian has put it, "You must never think that you pray alone, for even in your closet the host of heaven is with you." Prayer, whether made in private or in the company of others, is the way by which we join in earth's refrain to heaven's hymn.

WEEK 1



MORNING PRAYER

Sunday
Week 1

O Lord, open my lips.
And my mouth will proclaim your praise.

OPENING PRAYER

May our compassionate God drive away all our anguish, bestow health, and give us by the loving-kindness of the Father, the kingdom of the heavens. Amen.*

PSALM 95:1–7a

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he

is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

READING

Thomas à Kempis

Write my words on your heart and meditate diligently on them, for in the time of temptation they will be very necessary for you. What you do not understand as you read, you will understand in the day of visitation.

SPACE FOR REFLECTION

BENEDICTUS

Canticle of Zechariah: Luke 1:68–79

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago) salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

CLOSING PRAYERS

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Our Father, who art in heaven. . . .

Lord, hear my prayer.

And let my cry come unto you.

COLLECT

Almighty and ever-living God, we confidently call you Father as well as Lord. Renew your Spirit in us to make us more perfectly your children, that we may joyfully receive your promised inheritance. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Lord, hear my prayer.
And let my cry come unto you.
Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

May the souls of the faithful
by the mercy of God rest in peace.
Amen.
May divine help always be with us.
And with those who are absent from us.
Amen.

MIDDAY SERVICE

Sunday
Week 1

O God, come to my assistance.
O Lord, make haste to help me.

OPENING PRAYER

Mighty Ruler, true God, you who regulate the functions of all things and provide the morning its splendor, the midday its heat. Extinguish the flames of quarrels, take away harmful passions, grant healing of body and true peace of heart. Amen.

PSALM 1:1–3

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

SPACE FOR REFLECTION

CLOSING PRAYERS

Let your mercy, O Lord, be upon us.

As we have hoped in you.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Our Father, who art in heaven. . . .

Lord, hear my prayer.

And let my cry come unto you.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

May divine help always be with us.

And with those who are absent from us.

Amen.

VESPERS

Sunday

Week 1

O God, come to my assistance.

O Lord, make haste to help me.

OPENING PRAYER

O Light, blessed Trinity and perfect Unity, already the fiery sun is receding; pour the light of your presence into our hearts. Amen.

PSALM 111

Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever.

He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate. He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.

He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations. The works of his hand are faithful and just; and all his precepts are trustworthy. They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in

faithfulness and uprightness. He provided redemption for his people; He ordained his covenant forever—holy and awesome is his name. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

GOSPEL READING

John 1:1–5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

SPACE FOR REFLECTION

MAGNIFICAT

The Cantic of Mary: Luke 1:46b–55

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty

deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”

CLOSING PRAYERS

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Our Father, who art in heaven. . . .

Lord, hear my prayer.

And let my cry come unto you.

COLLECT

Almighty and ever-living God, we confidently call you Father as well as Lord. Renew your Spirit in us to make us more perfectly your children, that we may joyfully receive your promised inheritance. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Lord, hear my prayer.
And let my cry come unto you.
Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

May the souls of the faithful
by the mercy of God rest in peace.
Amen.
May divine help always be with us.
And with those who are absent from us.
Amen.

MORNING PRAYER

Monday *Week 1*

O Lord, open my lips.
And my mouth will proclaim your praise.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Splendor of the Father's glory, O true Sun, descend, sparkling with uninterrupted brightness; O radiance of the Holy Spirit, pour in upon our senses. Amen.

PSALM 24

The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.

He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory.

READING

Hal M. Helms

I the Lord am holy. I the Lord call you, my son, to greater holiness—holiness of thought, holiness of purpose. I am fashioning a people who bear the marks of my nature, who will be my witness in the present age, and will be with me in the ages to come.

SPACE FOR REFLECTION

CLOSING PRAYERS

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Our Father, who art in heaven . . .

Lord, hear my prayer.

And let my cry come unto you.

COLLECT

Almighty and eternal Father, a new day dawned when your only-begotten Son came among us. Grant that we who share in his human nature may also share in the kingdom of his glory. We pray this through the same Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Lord, hear my prayer.

And let my cry come unto you.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

May the souls of the faithful
by the mercy of God rest in peace.

Amen.

May divine help always be with us.
And with those who are absent from us.

Amen.

MIDDAY SERVICE

Monday
Week 1

O God, come to my assistance.
O Lord, make haste to help me.

OPENING PRAYER

O Christ, you are the Light, the Splendor of the Father, and the eternal Hope of all things. Listen to the prayers which your servants throughout the world pour forth. Amen.

PSALM 13

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.

SPACE FOR REFLECTION

CLOSING PRAYERS

Let your mercy, O Lord, be upon us.

As we have hoped in you.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Our Father, who art in heaven. . . .

Lord, hear my prayer.

And let my cry come unto you.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

May divine help always be with us.

And with those who are absent from us.

Amen.

VESPERS

Monday

Week 1

O God, come to my assistance.

O Lord, make haste to help me.

OPENING PRAYER

Pour into us now, O most loving One, the gift of eternal grace, so that, by the misfortunes of new deception, old error may not destroy us. Amen.

PSALM 8

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

GOSPEL READING

John 1:6-9

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

SPACE FOR REFLECTION

CLOSING PRAYERS

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Our Father, who art in heaven. . . .

Lord, hear my prayer.

And let my cry come unto you.

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Almighty and eternal Father, a new day dawned when your only-begotten Son came among us. Grant that we who share in his human nature may also share in the kingdom of his glory. We ask this through the same Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Lord, hear my prayer.
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Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

May the souls of the faithful
by the mercy of God rest in peace.
Amen.
May divine help always be with us.
And with those who are absent from us.
Amen.

MORNING PRAYER

Tuesday
Week 1

O Lord, open my lips.
And my mouth will proclaim your praise.

OPENING PRAYER

O Christ, dispel sleep, break the chains of night, release long-standing sin, and pour in new light. Amen.

PSALM 29

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the LORD shakes