

Praying the Liturgy of the Hours

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Deacons in Australia are obliged to pray the morning and evening Liturgy of the Hours (LOH). This obligation is listed in the Australian Catholic Bishops Guidelines, 2005, #10. The obligation is a ministry which they offer to the church and the world by keeping the intentions of the world and church in the regular rhythm of prayer. Praying the LOH is also an aid in the development of the holiness and spirituality of the deacon.

Deacons should be familiar with the use of the Breviary and the Ordo. During the time of their formation they should be introduced to both of these.

Finding your way around the Breviary is not easy especially during some feasts and seasons. Aspirants may benefit from being paired with a priest or deacon who has been praying the LOH for some time so that they can pray it together and learn by doing.

The Breviary comes in several forms. A three volume Divine Office includes the minor hours, night prayer, as well as the Office of Readings. There is a single volume Divine Office, which also includes parts of the smaller hours and night prayer. There is a much smaller Shorter Morning and Evening Prayer but it is probably not suitable for clergy as it does not have the full range of liturgical season, feast, solemnities and memoria included.

When the Body of the Son (church) prays, it is Christ who prays for us, in us and is prayed to by us.

Becoming familiar with the General Instruction on the LOH (GILOH) will assist deacons to enter into the spirit as well as the letter of the prayer. Once the theological framework is understood the praying of the Office becomes less an external obligation imposed and more a prayer of the heart. The GILOH is found at the start of volume one of the three volume version or at the start of the single volume edition.

Some key points from the GILOH may help us reflect on this ministry and aid spiritual nourishment.

Even when we pray this prayer alone, it is always the prayer of Christ and the Church (GILOH §6, 7). We should spend a little time before praying it to become conscious of all those in the Church with whom we pray this hour. Especially we pray in communion with our bishop and local church (diocese).

LOH is an experience of communion/koinonia with the Holy Trinity, with all those who are baptised and with the rest of the world.

We offer prayer to God the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit (§5). When the Body of the Son (church) prays, it is Christ who prays for us, in us and is prayed to by us (§7). The unity of the praying Church is brought about by the Spirit without whom there is no Christian prayer (§8).

The purpose of LOH is to sanctify the day and all human activity (§11). In praying the prayer we present the prayer of Christ who by his incarnation has in some way

united himself will every person (Gaudium et Spes 22). Its purpose is not the mere recitation of the psalms or the fulfilment of an obligation.

As well as praising God, the Church's liturgy expresses the hopes and prayers of all the Christian faithful and intercedes for the salvation of all the world (§17).



Those taking part in this prayer should make it their own so that it becomes a source of devotion, abundant grace and nourishment for personal prayer and apostolic activity. In praying it worthily, attentively and with devotion, they must attune their minds to their voices (§19).

We can see that in this prayer our liturgical, pastoral ministry and our ministry of word are intimately related. Deacons draw grace from the LOH to nourish their pastoral activity and their pastoral activity finds expression in the intentions offered and both of these are fed from the table of the word received in the psalms and other readings.

Perhaps we need to recall some of this as we prepare to celebrate the LOH. In this way we may make the prayer a prayer from the heart and not an obligation.