

Introducing Young People to the Liturgy of the Hours

by Emily Teter

Liturgy of the Hours (sometimes known as the Divine Office) is the daily prayer of the Church. It's meant to be a sanctification of time and a way to pray through each hour of the day. Religious are required to pray it daily and it's a great opportunity for our young people to get to know the Lord. While it may initially be tricky to get into it, there's an amazing opportunity within the prayer to help young people pray more fully.

According to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 84, the Divine Office "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" (SC 84). This dialogue uses the words and wisdom of God. Each of the "Hours" begins with a Psalm with a Gospel Canticle, which acts as a kind of meditation on the life of Christ.

There are five "hours" for the Divine Office: Office of Readings, Morning Prayer, Daytime Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours begin with a psalm, then there's a reading typically from the New Testament and then a Responsory, then a Gospel Canticle, then Intercessions which is concluded with the Our Father, finally, there's a closing prayer and a blessing, where we seek God's protection. The Divine Office follows a four-week Cycle and is offered in a book called a Breviary in a short version, a one volume and a four-volume series.

Liturgy of the Hours is all about sanctifying time and one of the most amazing parts of the prayer is the fact that at every hour of the day, one of the five hours is being prayed. It's amazing to think about: every single moment of a day is covered in prayer and that someone somewhere else is praying the exact same prayer at the exact same time. This is a great thing to mention to young people, as it helps them to understand the concept of transcendence, that something else is going on beyond what they see in front of them. Also, they can see the universality of the Church. Additionally, it helps them to see that there is a rhythm to each day.

One way to start teens into the habit of praying liturgy of the hours is to pray Night Prayer together. Unlike the other hours of the day, that change based on a four-week cycle and for feast days etc., Night prayer is the simplest prayer, and each day (Sunday-Saturday) has the same prayer from week to week. This will allow for young people to get into the rhythm by hearing the same prayer based on the day of the week. There's something great about predictability and that can allow for some students to go deeper by praying the other hours. Evening prayer includes an Examination of Conscience, a Psalm, a reading, a Gospel Canticle, and a closing prayer. It is meant to bring closure to the day. Consider using this prayer to end each day of a retreat with young people or as a way to end any of your small groupings.

Liturgy of the Hours can be prayed privately or in community and both offer the opportunity for us to go deeper into our faith. Designed to be prayed in a communal fashion different paragraphs are read by different people/groups based on where people are sitting and can offer assurance as someone is typically leading it as well as assisting with how to know where to go next within the Breviary. This allows for the Liturgy of the Hours to come alive as it is spoken out loud. Praying Liturgy of the Hours privately can allow for you to spend as much time as needed meditating on the Word of God. Additionally, throughout the Liturgical year, different Feast Days are honored through Liturgy of the Hours and this may be a great way to help teens understand more about Saints.

Liturgy of the Hours can be accessed through purchasing the breviary at a Catholic bookstore, or online through apps like ibreviary.com or the Halo App. Additionally, to know which pages to pray each day, you can purchase a guide or go online to <https://www.liturgyofthehours.org/todays-pages>. The Divine Office is a great way to help your young people to see the rhythm of the day, that at every moment, Christ seeks to sanctify those moments and it gives an opportunity for everyone to enter more deeply into the heart of prayer.

Works Cited:

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgy-of-the-hours>

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