Why Pray Morning Prayer?

Since we are unable to participate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist (Mass), this is a good time to look at the Liturgy of the Hours (aka the Psalter, aka the Breviary). Vatican II called it the prayer book of all the people of the Church. And it’s ancient. For example, after the peace of Constantine in 313, the Christians would gather in their local churches for Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer every day; but, not Mass. The daily prayer of the ancient Church was the Liturgy of the Hours.

The Liturgy of the Hours centers around the psalms. We can think of the psalms as God’s prayer book. Many of us have; or maybe as a child had, a prayer book that consisted of a bunch of Catholic prayers. These are of course very good and very helpful. Most were written by a member of the Church and in some cases a saint. The psalms were obviously written by a human person; but, the true author is God. It is God’s prayer book for us. So, in praying the psalms, we learn to pray God’s way. And all the forms of prayer are covered. There are psalms of praise and thanksgiving, contrition, trust, lament, and supplication. They are also very human. Every emotion is covered and often times with great passion.

The more deeply we pray the psalms, the more they will form us to be His children. For starters, the psalms will lead us to become much more God-centered. The psalms are strongly God-centered; in fact, one hundred and thirty-three of them mention God by name in the very first verse. But, they are also deeply human. The Liturgy of the Hours has been called the public prayer of the Church. It is offered not only *by* the Church; but also *for* the Church and the world, which means for real living persons. As we pray a psalm, we may not be able to identify with the emotion expressed in the psalm; but, there will be people in the Church and the world, for whom we are praying, who can. We can learn to pray not only for them, but in their name.

For example, in psalm 71 we pray “O God, you have taught me from my youth and I proclaim your wonders still. Now that I am old and grey-headed, do not forsake me God.” We may not be grey-headed; but, we can easily imagine elderly men and women launguishing in a Nursing Home. As we pray this psalm, we can pray in the person of these elderly people.

Many psalms sing the praises of God for all his blessings. There may be people who receive a blessing from God without giving a thought to praising and thanking Him. We can pray in their persons. The same can be done with psalms that seek forgiveness for sins, help in temptation, comfort in sorrow. I can pray in the person of those who need to pray these prayers but for some reason do not. Of course, as much as possible, I should make the sentiment of the psalms my own; but, praying in the other person is a great way of building the body of Christ and uniting myself to others – *if one suffers, all suffer; if one is honored, all rejoice,* c.f. 1 Cor 12:26).

Finally, the term liturgy comes from the greek term *leitourgia* which means public service, or public work. Thus, the liturgy is above all a public work of praise and worship of God. The Mass is the highest of all liturgies because there we unite all of our prayers, works, joys, and sufferings with the sacrifice of Jesus who offers them all to the Father. However, the Liturgy of the Hours is also a great public work in which the Church praises God in the words He gave us. In this time of tremendous need in our world, may the Liturgy of the Hours give fitting praise to God and become a helpful public service for our brothers and sisters affected by this virus.