

Keeping Time with God: Morning Prayer

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In *The Apostolic Tradition* (often attributed to Hippolytus around 215 C.E.), morning and evening prayer have a paschal orientation, nightfall and sunrise being metaphors of the dying and rising of Christ.¹ Clement, Origen and Tertullian related this to Christ as the sun of justice and the light of the world.² For the Eastern church in the third and fourth centuries, "the rising sun and the new day with its change from darkness to light recalled the resurrection from the dead of Christ, Sun of Justice."³

The morning office begins with Psalm 51:15: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise." When a time of silence has been kept from the previous office, these words have added significance as we "break the silence" with a prayer for praise. Every morning, however, we break the silence of sleep. Most of the prayers we pray are corporate: we say "we" and "us" even when we are praying alone. Here, however, we are reminded that the Lord breaks our silence and enables us to speak in praise of God and in communion with one another.

Hymnody, so important to our own spirituality, was not a part of the early Roman hours, but was present in the offices in Milan, Gaul and Iberia, was introduced into the Western monastic pattern by Benedict. It is significant that early in our morning prayer we use the words of hymn to speak to us and for us.

From the beginning, the Psalter has been the heart of the prayer of the daily office. The Roman office, following Vatican II, abandoned the monastic pattern of continuous psalmody (praying through the entire psalter from beginning to end) and adopted the "cathedral" approach of selecting psalms related to the hour of the office. The approach of the Lukan Daily Office takes an additional step, selecting psalms in relation to the liturgical year.

We have noted that the Daily Office is thoroughly trinitarian. In addition to the traditional "Gloria Patri", there are three forms of what we might call the "Lukan Gloria's." The first is a brief two lines, provided for us by the work of Brother Timothy in *The Book of Offices and Services*: "Glory to you, O Trinity, most holy and blessed; one God, now and forever. Amen."

The second was adapted by the editor from the words Sister Barbara Troxell often uses in the liturgies she leads. We might call it the "ordinary" form of the Gloria: "Glory to

¹ Taft, p. 25.

² Taft, p. 28.

³ Taft, p. 56.

God: Source of all, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit, One God: holy and blessed Trinity, who is now, ever was, and ever shall be for endless ages. Amen.”

The third form, which is recommended for use on festivals and holy days, comes from the work of David Power, one of the great liturgical theologians of our day. I heard it first in one of his presentations at the North American Academy of Liturgy, and he has been gracious in allowing us to use it.

Glory to God, Love abounding before all ages;
Glory to God, Love shown forth in the self-emptying of Jesus Christ;
Glory to God, Love poured out through the gift of the Spirit,
 who fashions and renews the face of the earth;
Glory to the holy and blessed Trinity!
All things abiding in Love, Love abiding in all things,
As it is now, ever was, and every shall be for endless ages. Amen.

I continue to marvel at the theological depth of Power’s words and to note their resonance with Charles Wesley’s recognition that “thy nature and thy name is Love.”⁴

After the reading of scripture and a time for silent reflection, we sing the morning canticle, the song of Zechariah, known as *The Benedictus*. Indeed the use of psalms and the evangelical canticles have sometimes been the only scripture used. Even when that is so, these songs from Luke proclaim the gospel to us day after day, week after week, year after year, in ways that work to conform us to Christ.

There follows a time of prayer, beginning with prayers of thanksgiving and supplication (most frequently provided for us by Brother Dan Benedict or Brother Timothy Crouch), the Collect for Peace based on a prayer by Bishop Francis Paget of the later nineteenth century, and an adaptation of the Church of England’s Collect for Grace by John W. Suter, Jr. A concluding prayer proper to the day week or season “collects” our prayers and is followed by the Lord’s Prayer.

After an appropriate hymn, we are sent forth to live out our prayer in the day we have received by God’s grace.

In the twentieth century, Dietrich Bonhoeffer recalled the central themes of Morning Prayer when he wrote:

The early morning belongs to the Church of the risen Christ. At the break of light it remembers the morning on which death and sin lay prostrate in defeat and new life and salvation were given to [hu]mankind. What do we today, who no longer have any fear or awe of night, know of the great joy that our forefathers and the early Christians felt every morning at the return of light? If we were to learn again something of the praise and adoration that is due the triune God at break of day, God the Father and Creator, who has preserved our life through

⁴ Final line of the final stanza of “Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown,” UMH 386.

the dark night and waken us to a new day, God the Son and Saviour, who conquered death and hell for us and dwells in our midst as Victor, God the Holy Spirit, who pours the bright gleam of God's Word into our hearts at the dawn of day, driving away all darkness and sin and teaching us to pray aright--then we would also begin to sense something of the joy that comes when night is past.⁵

So may it be for us as we pray Morning Prayer.

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⁵ *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954), pp. 40-43.