

## OBLATE RETREAT - Praying the Psalms: Living in the Divine Current - MASTER NOTES

Ps 92, 72, 95, 120-122 - Sept 23-25, 2022 - Fr. John Paul Le, O.S.B.

### I) 1ST CONFERENCE, FRIDAY NIGHT

#### INTRODUCTION

*"Jesus departed to the mountain to pray"*

-Luke 6:12

We have come from different places, but all of us here now, follow the example of Our Lord Jesus. We have departed from the world for this weekend and have ascended this little mountain to pray. We have left behind the cares and concerns of the world, which are important, but not more important than our relationship with God. Here for a few days we set apart our time on focus on "the better part". Here we will gather for a few days in the presence of Almighty God to pray, to reflect, to listen to his voice. So with Jesus, we too, have departed to the mountain to pray. My prayer is that this weekend and time away with Jesus will deepen your love for him and that you will be caught up current of Divine Love made possible by the incarnation of Christ.

The theme of this retreat is the Divine Office and the Psalms. The psalms are for us a school of prayer. It is the prayer about Christ and the prayer of Christ. It is my hope that through these conferences you will grow in greater appreciation of the great gift God has given us in the Divine Office and Psalms. I hope that you will come to better understand the spiritual reality taking place when we pray the Divine Office, and I hope to offer some tips on how we can enter into this prayer more fruitfully.

That being said, each conference will consist of three parts. The first part will focus on the Divine Office in General. The second part will focus on the meaning of a particular hour, such as Lauds or Vespers. The last part will focus on a particular psalm and/or Gospel canticle. It is a bit ambitious and perhaps it is trying to do too much, but I want to make best use of the time we have together.

Praying the Liturgy of the Hours is an essential element of Benedictine spirituality, whether monks or oblates. St. Benedict makes this priority clear with his often-repeated quote, "nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God."

These words are written in our cuculla closet. The place where monks enter and put on the garb that symbolizes their solemn profession. We wear the cuculla for Vespers of Sunday and Solemnities.

#### A) Importance of Divine Office

## 1) Christ's praise to the Father

In order to understand the significance of the Divine office, we have to go back in time, not just 1500 years ago when St. Benedict lived, not 3,000 years ago when the psalms were written, but even further. We have to go back to the beginning of time when there was no time. When there was only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For all eternity, the Son loves the Father and the Father loves the Son. From the beginning the Son praises the goodness of the Father. There is a current of love between the Divine Persons. Trinity is spoken of a *perichoreisis*, that is, the dance of the Three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From all eternity there is this current of exchange between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the Incarnation, the eternal Son of God, united himself to humanity and allowed us to enter into this eternal praise.

Everything Christ did transcends time. Romano Guardini writes, "[Jesus] was man and God in one, what he did was the result not only of human and temporal decision, but also of his divine and eternal will. Thus his action was not merely a part of transitory time, but existed simultaneously in eternity."

The Catechism relates the life of Christ to the liturgy, that is, the Sacraments and the Divine Office, saying, "In the liturgy of the Church, it is principally his own **Paschal mystery** that Christ signifies and makes present. During his earthly life Jesus announced his Paschal mystery by his teaching and anticipated it by his actions. When his **Hour** comes, he lives out the unique **event of history which does not pass away**: Jesus dies, is buried, rises from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father "once for all." His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and **all that Christ is** - all that he did and suffered for all men - **participates in the divine eternity**, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all" (1085).

Blessed Columba Marmion writes splendidly on the reality of the Divine Office, linking it to the praise of Christ to the Father. He writes, "The eternal Utterance, **the Word** – simply in being what He is – is like a **Divine Hymn**, a living Hymn, who **sings the praise of the Father** by expressing the plenitude of the Father's perfections. He is the Infinite Hymn, ceaselessly sounding in the heart's-embrace of the Father" (CLS 392).

"**The Word is the Canticle that God inwardly sings to Himself**, the Canticle that rises up from the depths of the Divinity, the Living Canticle wherein God eternally delights, because it is the infinite expression of His perfection" (CIM 295).

Through the incarnation of Christ, the eternal Son of God, humanity has been taken up into this current of life. This happens through the liturgy; principally through the Holy sacrifice of the Mass. Hence, liturgy is the most important work in which man can undertake, for it is not principally man's work, but God's work. For this reason, we speak of the liturgy as the "work of God". St. John Vianney brings this point home succinctly when he said, "Martyrdom is nothing in comparison with the Mass, because martyrdom is the sacrifice of man to God, whereas the Mass is the Sacrifice of God for man!"

Marmion writes, "There is no work that comes anywhere near the Divine Office. All other works are *opera hominum*. This is **truly 'the Work of God'** pre-eminently, because it is a work of praise that comes from God through the Word Incarnate and is offered by the Church, in Christ's Name" (CIM 300).

What is the relationship between the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours?

Marmion writes beautifully of the relationship between the Mass and the Divine Office saying,

"With **the Holy Sacrifice, around which it gravitates**, it forms the most complete expression of religion; it is by excellence "the work of God," *Opus Dei, Opus divinum*" (CIM 292).

The General Instruction reads, "The Liturgy of the Hours **extends to the different hours** of the day the praise and prayer, the memorial of the mysteries of salvation and the foretaste of heavenly glory, which are offered us in the eucharistic mystery, 'the center and culmination of the whole life of the Christian community'." (GILH 12).

Marmion writes,

"**Christ's Humanity is like the temple** where the Word sings the Divine canticle which glorifies the Father; or rather, the Sacred Humanity is carried along in the **current of the Divine Life**" (CIM 295).

This praise of Christ to the Father is not exclusive, rather, humanity is called to participate in this loving praise. He writes,

"Thus **in the heart of Christ** the praise of God finds expression in **human words** of adoration, propitiation and intercession; the head of renewed humanity and mediator of God prays to the Father in the name of and for the good of all mankind. (GILH 3).

"When this work is performed with all the faith, all the heart-felt confidence and all the love whereof our soul is capable, it surpasses every other work" (CIM 303).

## 2) Importance of praying Divine Office

St. Benedict writes, "<sup>1</sup>We believe that the divine presence is everywhere and *that in every place the eyes of the Lord are watching the good and the wicked* (Prov 15:3). <sup>2</sup>But beyond the least doubt we should believe this to be especially true when we celebrate the divine office."

The Church in her General Introduction to the Liturgy of the Hours speak of the importance of praying the Divine Office. The document states, "The public and communal prayer of the people of God is rightly considered among the **first duties of the Church**. From the very beginning the baptized 'remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and **to the prayers**' (Acts 2 :42)." (GILH 1)

Matthew 20:1-7. Parable of the Vineyard Workers.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at **dawn** to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about **nine** o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.’ So they went off. [And] he went out again around **noon**, and around **three** o’clock, and did likewise. Going out about **five** o’clock, he found others standing around, and said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They answered, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard.’

This parable as all parables have concrete application to daily life. God is looking for people to sing the divine praises. Every hour he invites us to pray, to “work” in his vineyard. The General Instruction sifts through passages of the bible relating to these hours in the New Testament. It reads,

“In the course of time other hours were also sanctified by communal prayer, hours which the Fathers judged were found in the Acts of the Apostles. For in the Acts the disciples are presented as coming together at the **third** hour [Pentecost]. The prince of apostles ‘went to the housetop at about the **sixth** hour to pray’ (10:9); ‘Peter and John were going up to the Temple for the prayers at the **ninth** hour’ (3:1); late that **night** Paul and Silas were praying and singing God’s praises’ (16 :25)”. (GILH 1)

Is this practice merely for priests and religious? No, it is a prayer of the whole Christ with both head and members. The read from the general instruction,

“Wherever **groups of the laity** are gathered and whatever the reason which has brought them together, such as prayer or the apostolate, they are **encouraged to recite the Church’s Office**, by celebrating part of the Liturgy of the Hours. For they should learn to adore God the Father in spirit and in truth especially through liturgical worship . . . Finally, it is fitting that the **family**, as the domestic sanctuary of the Church, should not only offer common prayer to God but also say certain parts of the Liturgy of the Hours, in this way uniting themselves more closely to the Church.” (GILH 27).

This work glorifies God more than any other work, and at the end of every psalm we pray the glory be since the

“direct aim of the Office is to confess and exalt the Divine perfections” (CIM 293).

## B) Lauds in General

### 1) Introduction

- The meaning of Lauds is praise.

Quigley writes, "The word "Lauds" is derived from the **Latin *laus*, praise**.

The name is said to have been given to this Hour on account of the last three Psalms, which formerly formed part of the Office. In these **Psalms, 148, 149, 150**, the word *Laudate* recurs several times.

[Each Office can be related to one of the mysteries of Christ. Lauds is closely related to Christ's resurrection.] This is the **Office of daybreak** and hence its **symbolism is of Christ's resurrection**. '**Christ, the light of the world, rose from the tomb on Easter morning, like a radiant sun, trampling over darkness** and shedding His brightness upon earth. The hymns, psalms, antiphons and versicles of Lauds, all proclaim the mystery of Christ's Resurrection, and the light which enlightens our souls. . . Lauds remains the true morning prayer, which hails in the rising sun, the image of Christ triumphant – consecrates to Him the opening day" (Quigley 169-170).

Therefore, we ought to be thinking about the resurrection of Christ when we pray Lauds. We can think about the scripture verse before we pray lauds, "He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay" (Mt 28:6).

'By the venerable tradition of the universal Church, **Lauds** as morning prayer **and Vespers** as evening prayer are the **two hinges** on which the daily Office turns. (GILH 37).

Lauds is designed to sanctify the morning, as is clear from many of its parts. Saint Basil the Great excellently described its character as morning prayer in these words [about Lauds]: '[It] **consecrates to God the first movements of our minds and hearts**; no other care should engage us before we have been moved with the thought of God, as it is written, "I thought of God and sighed" (Ps 76:4), nor should the body undertake any work before we have done what is said, "I say this prayer to you, Lord, for at daybreak you listen for my voice; and at dawn I hold myself in readiness for you, I watch for you" (Ps 5 :4-5).' (GILH 38).

### 2) "O God Come to my assistance."

John Cassian – Conference X (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/350810.htm>).

"This formula then shall be proposed to you of this system, which you want, and of prayer, which every monk in his progress towards continual recollection of God, is accustomed to ponder, ceaselessly revolving it in his heart, having got rid of all kinds of other thoughts; for he cannot possibly keep his hold over it unless he has freed himself from all bodily cares and anxieties. And as this was delivered to us by a few of those who were left of the oldest fathers, so it is only divulged by us to a very few and to those who are really keen. And so for keeping up continual recollection of God this pious formula is to be ever set before you. **O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me**, for this verse has not unreasonably been picked out from the **whole of Scripture** for this purpose. For it embraces all the feelings which can be implanted in human nature, and can be fitly and satisfactorily adapted to every condition, and all assaults."

"I am affected by the passion of **gluttony**. I ask for food of which the desert knows nothing, and in the squalid desert there are wafted to me odors of royal dainties and I find

that even against my will I am drawn to long for them. I must at once say: O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me.”

“When I want for the sake of **steadfastness** of heart to apply myself to reading a headache interferes and stops me, and at the third hour sleep glues my head to the sacred page, and I am forced either to overstep or to anticipate the time assigned to rest; and finally an overpowering desire to sleep forces me to cut short the canonical rule for service in the Psalms: in the same way I must cry out: O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me.”

[When]“Encompassed by nightly horrors of devils I am agitated, and am disturbed by the appearances of **unclean spirits**, my very hope of life and salvation is withdrawn by the horror of fear. Flying to the safe refuge of this verse, I will cry out with all my might: O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me.”

“We must then **ceaselessly and continuously** pour forth the prayer of this verse, in adversity that we may be delivered, in prosperity that we may be preserved and not puffed up. Let the thought of this verse, I tell you, be conned over in your breast without ceasing. Whatever work you are doing, or office you are holding, or journey you are going, do not cease to chant this. When you are going to bed, or eating, and in the last necessities of nature, think on this. This thought in your heart maybe to you a **saving formula**, and not only keep you unharmed by all attacks of devils, but also purify you from all faults and earthly stains, and lead you to that invisible and celestial contemplation, and carry you on to that ineffable glow of prayer, of which so few have any experience.”

It is perhaps due to Cassian’s influence that this verse has been added to the opening of the Divine Office for most of the Hours.

Quigley 144. St. John Climacus says. . . In repeating these holy words we make the **sign of the Cross**; for, all grace comes from the sacrifice of the Cross; and besides, it is a holy and an ancient practice to being all good works with the sacred sign.” Already used a lot by early monks, e.g., Antony, Benedict. St. Benedict in his life overcame many things with the sign of the cross such as, cracking the chalice when his disciples tried to poison him, making a little black bird that was bothering him fly away, and allowing his monks to pick up a heavy rock to construct a monastery.

## C) **Psalm 92 (Lauds for Saturday)**

### 1) **Introduction**

Bible note – “A Psalm. A Sabbath song.”

“a prominent place in the Sabbath liturgy of the temple . . . The psalmist and the entire congregation who rest with God on the seventh day after the ‘work which he had done in creation’ join in thanksgiving for the goodness of earth and life . . . Yahweh, whose sacred name is repeated seven times in Ps 92, again consonant with the Sabbath” (Stuhlmüller 22.75)

“musical indications within the psalm also suggest that it belongs in a liturgical setting. . . three stanzas. The first stanza proclaims the intent to praise . . . the second and third stanzas are more specific about God’s acts.” (Nowell 104-105)

## 2) Aids

Antiphon. "We do well to sing to your name, Most High, and proclaim your mercy at daybreak."

Psalm Title - "Praise of God the Creator"

Christological Text - "Sing in praise of Christ's redeeming work (Saint Athanasius)".

<p><b>It is good to praise you, O LORD,</b> and sing to your name, O Most High,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-to do good, just, virtue of religion</li> <li>-importance of singing, and of names</li> <li>-sign of cross, "in the name of . . ."</li> <li>-holy name of Jesus</li> </ul>
<p><b>To describe your unfailing love at daybreak,</b> your faithfulness through the hours of the night;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- at <b>daybreak Christ rose from the dead</b></li> <li>- <b>St. Benedict</b> writes, "at daybreak, Lauds should follow immediately" (8:4)</li> <li>- from the rising of the sun to its setting (Mass)</li> <li>- unfailing love even in difficulties</li> <li>-faithfulness related to covenant</li> <li>-night - at midnight I rise to praise you, quoted in HR</li> </ul>
<p>To the accompaniment of zither and harp and the melody of a lyre.</p>	<p>Voice and song, inanimate objects praise God as do the creatures, "ice and snow, bless the Lord." "you dolphins and all water creatures, bless the Lord."</p>
<p>Yes, O LORD, you gladden me with what you do; I sing out for joy at the work of your hands.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- God brings joy.</li> <li>- creation, Romans 1:20 -"Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made."</li> <li>-hands, wounds. Work of redemption</li> </ul>
<p>How great your works are, O LORD, <b>how deep your thoughts, O Great One!</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- we have the mind of Christ</li> <li>- God ways/thoughts are not the same as ours.</li> <li>- the Word of God incarnate</li> </ul>
<p>The brainless man does not comprehend, the fool does not understand</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use of reason is a gift</li> <li>- fool trusts in himself</li> <li>-fool vs wise/wisdom</li> </ul>
<p><b>That, although the wicked grow like weeds</b> and those who do evil thrive, he will destroy them forever and ever.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- broad road. Holy Rule - way is narrow at the outset.</li> <li>-thrive-only temporarily, they will be forgotten; we can be envious of sinners, but sin is its own punishment</li> <li>-eventually death</li> </ul>

But you are forever exalted, O LORD, and your enemies, O LORD, will perish;	-from eternity - devil and minions
They will surely perish, and idolaters will be scattered.	- enemies will perish - idolatry forbidden in first commandment, golden calf - idolatry is putting anything before God, even good things
<b>But you let me be like a wild ox</b> tossing its horn; I am anointed with fresh oil.	- strength, life, energy - bull-riding - anointed – baptismal imagery, combat
My eyes have seen the rout of those who defame me, and my ears have heard of the defeat of those evil assailants.	- victory comes by God’s work - passing on stories, deeds of God
The just man will flourish like a palm tree and grow like a cedar of Lebanon.	- grow tall and majestic - cedars used to build temple?
<b>Those who are transplanted to the house of the LORD</b> will grow vigorous in the courts of our God.	- house – sacred spaces, MtA, Blessed Sacrament. Also our bodies - vigorous – lively
<b>They will still put out buds in old age;</b> they will still be green and fresh,	- always fruitful, Ps 1:3 “He is like a tree planted near streams of water, that yields its fruits in season; its leaves never wither; whatever he does prosper”. Rev 22:1-2, “Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of its street. On either side of the river grew the tree of life that produces fruit twelve times a year, once each month; the leaves of the trees serve as medicine for the nations.” - H.S. – ordinary time green.
So they may proclaim how fair the LORD, my Mountain, is; there is no iniquity in him.	- rock, unmovable, stable - no iniquity – only good

## D) Benedictus

### 1) Background

Quigley- “they [Benedictus and Magnificat] form as it were the culminating point of their respective Hours, and for feast days the altar is incensed while they are chanted.” In the Abbey, we incense the altar for Christmas Lauds, and during the Sunday Vespers for Solemnities and the O Antiphons.



John Paul II references taken from General Audience October 1, 2003 - Benedictus sung by Zechariah at the joy of the birth of John the Baptist “reflects the liturgical usage current in the original Christian community.”

<p>Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty savior, born of the house of his servant David.</p>	<p>“David” - “The power, which was of old in the family of David for the defense of the nation, is being restored, and in a higher and more spiritual sense” (Quigley 176).</p>
<p>Through his holy prophets he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us. He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.</p>	
<p>This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.</p>	
<p>You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people <b>knowledge of salvation</b> by the <b>forgiveness of their sins</b>.</p>	<p>“salvation” “The canticle is known as the canticle of joyous hope, hence its <b>use at funerals at the moment of interment</b>, when words of thanksgiving for the Redemption are especially in place as an expression of Christian hope” (Quigley 177). I did this for Rosemarie’s Santogrossi’s funeral.</p>

In the tender compassion of our God  
**the dawn from on high shall break upon us,**  
to **shine on those who dwell in darkness**  
**and the shadow of death,**  
and to **guide our feet** into the way of peace.

**JP II** - "dawn" and "on high", is actually full of meaning. Indeed, in the original Greek, the "rising sun" is *anatolè*, a word which in itself means both the light of the sun that shines on our planet and a new shoot that sprouts. Both these images have messianic value in the biblical tradition.

On the one hand, Isaiah reminds us, speaking of the Emmanuel, that "**the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light**; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined" (Is 9: 1). On the other, referring once again to the king-Emmanuel, he describes him as the "shoot from the stump of Jesse", that is, from the house of David, a shoot upon which the Spirit of the Lord was to rest (cf. Is 11: 1-2).

**Prophet Malachi** had announced: "For you who fear my name, there will arise **the sun of justice with its healing rays**" (3: 20). This sun "guides our feet into the way of peace" (Lk 1: 79).

[quoting St. Bede] "**he redeemed his people, for at the price of his blood he set us free when we had become servants of sin and slaves of the ancient enemy.... Christ found us lying 'in darkness and in the shadow of death'**, that is, oppressed by the long-lasting blindness of sin and ignorance.... **He brought to us the true light of his knowledge, and banishing the darkness of error**, he has shown us the sure way to the heavenly homeland. He has directed the steps of our actions to make us walk on the path of truth, which he has pointed out to us, and to enable us to enter the home of eternal peace, which he has promised us".

## Bibliography

- Ambrose, St. *Explanation of the Psalms*. Ps. 1, 4. 7-8: CSEL 64, 4-7. Found in the LOTH 10<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time, Office of Readings, Friday.
- Benedict XVI. "Peace upon you!" General Audience on Oct. 12, 2005.
- Benedict XVI. "My soul glorifies the Lord." General Audience on Feb. 15, 2006.
- Cassian, John. Conference X. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/350810.htm>.
- Driscoll, Jeremy. "Every Passage of Scripture which referred to Him": The Psalms in Christian Prayer. *ABR* 67:2. Pp. 158-171.
- General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours* (GILH).
- Guardini, Romano. *The Lord*. Pp 432-433.
- John Paul II. "Benedictus." General Audience on Oct. 1, 2003.
- . "Justice shall flourish." General Audience on Dec. 1, 2004.
- . "He shall save the poor." General Audience on Dec. 15, 2004.
- . "Israel's guard." General Audience on May 4, 2005.
- Marmion, Columba. *Christ in His Mysteries* (CHM). Translated by Alan Bancroft, Zaccheus Press, 2008.
- . *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk: Spiritual Conferences on the Monastic and Religious Life* (CIM). Translated from the French, Roger A. McCaffrey Publishing, 1926.
- . *Christ, the Ideal of the Priest* (CIP). Translated by Matthew Dillon, 1952. Adapted by David Toups, Ignatius Press, 2005.
- . *Christ, the Life of the Soul* (CLS). Translated by Alan Bancroft, Zaccheus Press, 2005.
- Nowell, Irene. *Sing a New Song: The Psalms in the Sunday Lectionary*. Liturgical Press, 1993.
- Quigley, Rev. E. J. *The Divine Office: A Study of the Roman Breviary*. Herder Book Company, 1920.
- Stuhmueller, Carroll. *Old Testament Message 21: Psalms 1 (Psalm 1-72)*. Liturgical Press, 1983.
- Stuhmueller, Carroll. *Old Testament Message 22: Psalms 2 (Psalm 73-150)*. Michael Glazier, 1983.