

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) 4TH CONFERENCE, SUNDAY MORNING

A) Divine Office, Miscellaneous Matters

1) **Intercessory Prayer**

We are probably often asked to pray for many things. There are many needs that our friends and loved ones present to us, and there are also the personal prayers that we have. What is the best form of intercessory prayer? The answer is the liturgy. Marmion writes,

“How could such a prayer *not* be pleasing to God, seeing that He receives it from Christ?” (CLS 401); “It is Christ who prays, and **Christ ever has the right to have His prayer granted**” (CLS 401). Since this Divine Office is not our prayer, but rather the prayer of Christ in which we participate, the intentions we bring to the Divine Office are heard and answered most readily. If we have a concern or need, we can offer the Office for that intention. This can help with distraction as well, since we can leave the concern in God’s hands as we offer him the prayer.

“God loves all that comes from Himself or from His Son, and so this prayer which we address to Him in the name of His Son is **most pleasing to Him, and efficacious for us: *Pater ego sciebam quia semper me audis (Joan., XI, 42)***” (CIM 315)

The General Instruction echoes the efficacy of the Liturgy of the Hours stating, “Whoever takes part in the Liturgy of the Hours makes the Lord’s people grow by imparting to them a **hidden apostolic fruitfulness.**” (GILH 18). We cannot always see the results of our prayer.

It continues,

“As well as praising God, the Church’s liturgy expresses the hopes and prayers of all the Christian faithful and **intercedes** before Christ and through him before the Father for the **salvation of the whole world.** This voice is not only of the Church but of Christ. It is in the name of Christ that she prays, that is, ‘**through Jesus Christ our Lord,**’ and so the Church continues to offer that prayer and entreaty which Christ offered during his life on earth.” (GILH 17). We hear this so often during liturgy. Have we taken a moment to think about what this means. We offer our prayer through Christ to the Father. Jesus is taking our prayer to the Father.

Marmion offers a haunting quote of the great responsibility we have to prayer saying, “**without my prayer, which is that of Thy Son, there might perhaps be some at this moment who would be lost for eternity**” (CIM 333). We speak about the efficacy of prayer, but what if we fail to pray.

2) **Suffering**

“suffering gives to love a special splendor and a singular value; to love God in suffering is truly the height of self-oblation; our divine savior loved His Father with immense love at each instant of His life, but this love shone out in an incomparable way **during His Passion**” (CIM 307).

Sacrificium Laudis. He who offers praise as a sacrifice glorifies me. Psalm 116:12, 17 reads, “How can I repay the Lord for all the great good done for me?” It answers, “I will offer a sacrifice of praise and call on the name of the Lord.”

Marmion writes of the value of suffering when we pray, “in the midst of indescribable tortures, **Christ Jesus recited ‘the Office,’** and, at that moment, because He was suffering, he gave, much more than when **on Tabor**, infinite glory to His Father” (CIM 308). Psalm 22. “My God, my god, why have you forsaken me” Praying the Liturgy of the Hours is not always easy. Sometimes, it can require all the effort and will we can muster. It is sometimes an **oblation** we make to God. I like to think of the choir stalls as the fiery furnace in which the three young men were enclosed. The choir is a place of both sacrifice and praise. An antiphon for Lauds reads, “In the midst of the flames, the three young men cried out with one voice, “Blessed be God, blessed be God.” When I asked a monk, who was leaving, why he was leaving, he simply said, “I’m not called to be a choir monk.” That says a lot about the challenges of praying the Divine Office regardless of our state of life.

Yes, it is difficult and challenging. Maybe not here, but at home, when you’re busy, when your tired, when you don’t feel like it. Marmion makes an interesting analogy about remaining faithful to prayer saying,

“These three (**BVM, Magdalene, John**) . . . **remained ‘in their stalls’** when the soul of Christ, the supreme High Priest, sang its sorrowful canticle for the world’s salvation.” (CIM 309?). We can think of praying the Divine Office as remaining in **our** choir stalls.

3) **The Sanctification of Mankind through the Work of God**

Abbot Jeremy speaks of the Divine Office as the Work of God because **God is working on us**. Through the liturgy God transforms us into the likeness of his son. Marmion writes,

“The primary object of the divine Office is to praise God, to pay Him homage. **But** in His goodness, the Lord allows the soul...to draw from it **rich fruits of sanctification**” (CIP 268)

“Moreover, God **not allowing Himself to be out-done in generosity**, the same sacrifice of praise becomes for the one who accomplishes it the **way of salvation and beatitude**” (CIM 309). “Oh! How pleasing to God is this prayer! How it mortifies body and soul! How it obtains graces and expiates sin!” (CIM 336)

“the purpose of the Office is to **sanctify the day and all human activity.**” (GILH 11). We consecrate the hours of the day through the Liturgy of the Hours.

“When the soul performs **all the ceremonies**, even the smallest, carefully and lovingly, it is gradually formed to that **inward reverence** which is, as we have said, the very root of humility” (CIM 317).

What happens to the soul who faithfully prays these psalms? Marmion writes, “the **soul is molded little by little upon Christ**, it Ideal, and is gradually transformed into Him, by **entering into the sentiments felt by His Divine heart** when He lived each of His mysteries” (CIM 318). This is a long process and does not occur over night. But slowly in time, we begin to imitate Christ, the Word of God, by spending time with the Word of God.

This is a sure way. Sometimes, people get flustered with all the numerous spiritual practices available (chaplets, novenas, spiritual reading, devotional prayers, etc.). Br. Charles experienced this. And there can a danger in creating our own spirituality. Praying the liturgy is a sure way. Marmion writes,

“If we try to create or arrange our own spiritual life, there is danger of putting much of ourself into it much that is human . . . **walking in the footsteps of the Church, there is no risk of going astray**. The secret of the safety, as of the simplicity and breadth, of Benedictine spirituality lies in the fact that it **borrowes not from ever fallible man, but from the Church**, from the Holy Spirit” (CIM 319).

4) Aids in Praying the Work of God

We all struggle with distractions, and we should do what we can to limit them. St. Benedict hopes that we will “stand to sing the psalms in such a way that our minds are in harmony with our voices” (19:7).

“If we do not **beg the help of God before giving ourselves to the Divine Praise**, we shall never accomplish it well . . . ‘Before prayer prepare thy soul: and be not as a man that tempteth God’ What is ‘to tempt God?’ It is to undertake an action without being assured of the means of carrying it out” (CIM 321). Pray before you pray and after you pray.

“Before the Divine Office

O Lord open my lips to bless Thy Holy Name, and cleanse my mind from all vain and evil and wondering thoughts. Enlighten my understanding and kindle my affections, that I may fittingly recite this office unto Thee with attention and devotion, so that it may be meet to be heard before the presence of Thy divine majesty. Through Christ our Lord, amen.

O Lord in union with that divine intention wherewith Thou Thyself didst offer Thy prayers to God while upon this earth, I now recite this office unto Thee.

After the Divine Office

To the Holy and Undivided Trinity, To the crucified humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, To the fruitful virginity of the Blessed and Glorious Ever Virgin Mary, And to the whole

company of saints, Be everlasting praise, honor, power, and glory from every creature. And unto us the remission of all of our sins forever, world without end, amen.”¹

Before Office, think about prayer intentions: [family and friends], Church, pope, bishops, priests, missionaries, poor sick, suffering, in temptation, etc. (CIM 324).

“Let the *Gloria Patri*, by its frequent recurrence, be an opportunity of reawakening our vigilance” (CIM 335). Also, recommended by Abbot Gregory.

5) **The Work of God as a Foretaste of Heaven**

This heavenly liturgy was seen by the prophets as a **victory of day over night, of light over darkness**. (GILH 16).

By offering praise to God in the Hours, the Church joins in singing that canticle of praise which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven; it is a **foretaste of the heavenly praise sung unceasingly before the throne of God and the Lamb**, as described by John in Revelation. Our intimate union with the Church in heaven is put into effect when ‘with common rejoicing we celebrate together the praise of the divine Majesty. (GILH 16).

B) **Noon Prayer (Little Hours)**

Important prayer? Yes, very.

from Quigley 202. “**Antiquity**. The custom of praying at these three hours, terce, sext and none, is very ancient. It was in use amongst the **devout Jews**, and the early converts to Christianity retained the practice.”

1) **Psalm 120-122 (Noon Prayer for Sunday)**

Psalms of ascent. Going up to Jerusalem. Christ going to Calvary.

“Psalm 120-134. These fifteen psalms are each entitled “A song of ascents . . . a gradual canticle . . . hence the name in liturgical books, ‘gradual psalms . . . 15 steps from the court of the women to the court of Israel . . . their being chanted by pilgrims, especially from the distant diaspora, on their dangerous journey to and from Jerusalem . . . the psalms center upon the temple at Jerusalem, which beckons the pilgrim” (Stuhlmüller 22.156). **Psalm 120-128 were prayed every day from Tuesday-Saturday in Saint Benedict’s Office.**

These hours relate to our Lord’s passion. **9 o’clock – condemned; Noon – raised on cross; 3pm – died.**

2) **On Terce**

– 9 o’clock. from Quigley 202-203. “Terce is called the **golden Hour**, *hora aurea*, because at this time of the day, the third Hour, the **Holy Ghost**, who is typified by gold, descended on the apostles. It is called sometimes the sacred Hour because in conventional churches it is

¹ <https://meaningofcatholic.com/2020/02/12/prayers-before-and-after-the-divine-office/>

recited immediately before Holy Mass. It is the most solemn of all the small Hours. . . Why does the Church wish us to pray at the third hour? . . . 1. To remind us of the **hour when our Savior was condemned**. 2. To remind us of the hour at which the Holy Ghost descended on the Church." See hymn below. "**Texts** - 'Therefore, Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him.' 'And the soldiers plaiting a crown of thorns put it on His head; and they put on Him a purple garment.' 'And they came to Him and said, "Hail, King of the Jews." And they gave Him blows' . . . **Intentions** . . . Devotion to the Holy Ghost

3) On Sext

- from Quigley 204. "At this hour, the Christians met for public, joint prayer [Peter went up to the roof terrace to pray at about **noontime** (Acts 10:9)] . . . Why does the Church wish us to pray at the sixth hour of the day? 1. Because at this hour **Christ instructed the Samaritan woman**, the type of the Gentiles; and He promised to give the **living water**, springing up unto life everlasting, which was his blood, poured out on Calvary at the sixth hour. 2. Because at the sixth hour **Christ was raised on the cross** for our salvation and it is right and just, daily, to remember Him and His great love for us.

Hymn for Sext translated by Cardinal Newman

"O God, Who canst not change nor fail,
Guiding the hours as they go by,
Brightening with beam the morning pale,
And burning in the midnight sky,
Quench Though the fires of hate and strife,
The wasting fever of the heart;
From perils guard our feeble life,
And to our souls Thy grace impart."

Texts [to meditate upon]. 1. "And they took Jesus, and after they had mocked Him, they took off the purple from Him and put His own garments on Him and led Him out to crucify him. 2. **Bearing His own cross, Jesus went forth to that place called Calvary.** . . . **Intentions** . . . for **patience** . . . practice of **mortification**."

4) On None

from Quigley 206-208. "Now Peter and John went up into the Temple at the ninth hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1). "**Why** does the Church desire prayer at the ninth hour? 1. In this she follows the example of her Founder, **Christ, Who prayed at the ninth hour**, 'At the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying "Eloi, Eloi lamma sabachthani?" . . . **Texts** [for meditation] . . . '**Lord remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy Kingdom**' 'My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me? . . . **Intentions** . . . intentions of **Sacred Heart** . . . fervor . . . for **Mass**."

C) Hymns

From Quigley 146-147. "Hymns were introduced into the Divine Office in the Eastern Church before the time of St. Ambrose. **To combat the Arians**, who spread their errors by

verse set to popular airs, **St. Ambrose**, it is said, introduced public liturgical hymn-singing in his church in Milan, and his example was followed gradually through the Western Church. The **final stanza** of a Breviary hymn is called the **doxology**." Experience of praying with Salesians. Think of influence of bad music today. How to counter? Sing Christian hymns.

1) **Hymn** (sung for Noon Prayer today. Noon prayer takes the three little hours and reduces them into one)

"Into the silence of our hearts,
With Father and with Son,
In answer to our constant prayer,
O Holy Spirit come."

Nunc Sancte Nobis Spiritus prayed at Terce (3rd hour 9am). The time when the Holy Spirit came upon Our Lady and the apostles in the upper room.

D) **Psalm 120**

"we can see it as spoken gratefully after safe arrival at the Jerusalem temple"
(Stuhlmüller 22.157).

Psalm title - "Longing for peace". Going to Jerusalem, the city of peace, to the temple. Even though there is no explicit mention of Jerusalem in the psalm.

Christological text - "Be patient in suffering; persevere in prayer" (Rom 12:12).

Antiphon - "Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia." Praise the Lord. Sunday is the Lord's day. The day he rose from the dead; this is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad (Ps 118).

Progression of psalms, from sorrow (ps 120) to joy (ps 122)

When I was under attack, I called to the LORD, and he answered me.	- prayer of Christ during passion - our prayer during agony - attack by his people, romans, disciples
"O LORD, save my life from lying lips and from deceitful tongues."	- false witnesses, Pharisees and chief priests and elders. - Christ said he was King and would rebuild temple in three days.
You deceitful tongue, what will he give you? And what more will be given you besides?	
The sharpened arrows of a warrior, and glowing coals of broom-wood.	- archers spoken of by mystic Anne Catherine Emmerich in the <i>Dolores Passion</i> .
What misery is mine! My fate is the same whether I wander in Meshech, or live in the tents of Kedar.	- "Meshech (in the distant north) and to Kedar (close by in the Syro-Arabian desert) may be indicative of any hostile, non-Israelite people" (Stuhlmüller 22.158) - death is the fate of all

I would still be living too close, too close to men who hate peace.	- "hate peace" - <i>Passion</i> movie, cruel roman soldiers, absence of peace.
I was in favor of peace and I said so; but they wanted only war.	- seeking peace as in psalm title notes. - Christ is the Prince of Peace

E) **Psalm 121**

"A dialogue psalm to evoke confidence in Yahweh . . . consists of a priestly blessing of confidence as the pilgrim is about to depart on the hazardous journey home" (StuhlmueLLer 22.158-159).

Prayed at the **reception of postulants**. The postulant is received by the Abbot in the switchboard area and then he is clothed in the habit. He then goes with the Abbot in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the Abbey church where the other monks are praying. The Abbot then says the words, "In the presence of the Lord whom you have come to seek on this holy mountain, we pray for his choicest blessings upon you, in the words of the psalmist: [psalm is prayed by everyone]. [GET HANDOUT postulancy].

"It is recited in the church's ancient **office of the dead**" (StuhlmueLLer 22.159). The antiphon reads, "I know that my Vindicator lives, and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust." Therefore, we can pray this psalm in two ways, as one is beginning a spiritual journey or for one who is beginning their journey to heaven. The psalm offers beautiful bookends for the monastic journey.

It is also the prayer of Christ before ascending Mount Calvary.

Psalm title - "Guardian of his people"

Christological text - "Never again shall they hunger and thirst, never again know scorching heat" (Rev 7:16).

If I raise my eyes to the mountains, where would my help come from?	- " <i>Jesus departed to the mountain to pray</i> " -Luke 6:12. In Luke, we read that Jesus was "resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:51). - mountain of Jerusalem where temple is, where God dwells. - help comes from mountain/rock - "However, the word "mountains" can also conjure up images of idolatrous shrines in the so-called "high places" . . . We see the high places that spread out before us as a promise of life: wealth, power, prestige, the easy life. These high places are temptations, for they truly seem like the promise of life. But with our faith we realize that this is not true and that these high places are not life. True life, true help, comes from the Lord. And we turn our gaze, therefore, to the true high places, to the true mountain: Christ. - Mt. Calvary - Liturgy, altar elevated. Need to ascend steps.
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My help comes from the presence of the LORD, the one who made heaven and earth.	- God is with us in trial - "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
He will not let you lose your footing, because your Guardian will not grow drowsy.	- the 3 falls of Christ according to stations. - he fell and rose so we would rise when we fall. - "It is a Psalm of trust, for the Hebrew verb <i>shamar</i> , " to safeguard, to protect ", is repeated in it six times . God, whose name is frequently invoked, emerges as the ever vigilant, attentive and concerned "guardian", the "sentinel" who keeps watch over his people to protect them from every hazard and danger" (JP II)
The Guardian of Israel does not sleep, nor will he ever slumber.	- God keeps watch, vigil in the night
The LORD is your Guardian, the LORD is your shade, as he stands at your side .	- Shade in the tree of the cross - "the Lord who is "at [the] right side " of his faithful (cf. Ps 121[120]: 5). This is the position of defense, both in military and court contexts : it is the certainty of never being abandoned in a time of trial, in an assault by evil or by persecution" (JP II) - protector - Mary and John at side of Christ
By day the sun will not strike you, nor the moon by night	- protected from nature.
The LORD will guard you from all evil, he will guard your life. The LORD will guard your going and your coming, from now until eternity.	- Amen. Like father guards his children. -

F) Psalm 122

Prayer of joy for journey to Jerusalem.

Prayed at the hour when Christ died. A hopeful psalm that can be interpreted as Christ going to the Father or the soul finding God.

Psalm title - Holy city Jerusalem

Christological text - "You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb 12:2). Jerusalem can be symbolic of heaven or the soul. Heaven is described as the mountain of God. Revelation says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (21:1-2).

<p>I was glad with those who said to me: "We are going to the house of the LORD."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we have gone through the journey, the trials, the difficulties, now joy awaits us. - temple of Jerusalem. - Christ is new temple. - We are on the threshold of heaven
<p>Our feet will be standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pearly gates of heaven - Christ is the gate - procession of Palm Sunday
<p>Jerusalem is a city built to be His; He planned it to be compact and secure.</p>	<p>- " let us not forget that "there is one foundation that supports the full weight of the construction; and it is our Redeemer, who alone bears all together the customs of us all. The Apostle says of him: "No one can lay a foundation other than the one that has been laid, namely, Jesus Christ' (I Cor 3: 11)" (JP II quoting Gregory. See 2, 1, 5: <i>Opere di Gregorio Magno</i>, III/2, Rome, 1993, pp. 27, 29)</p>
<p>To Jerusalem the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the heavenly Jerusalem, every people, tribe and tongue. - all nations stream toward Church
<p>It is a solemn command, O Israel, to give thanks to the Name of the LORD.</p>	
<p>In Jerusalem is the throne of judgment, the throne of the house of David.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Christ sits at right hand of power
<p>May they pray for your peace, Jerusalem; those who love you, may they prosper!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "The prayer for peace (v. 6) begins with a haunting paronomasia in the Hebrew: <i>sha'alu shalom yerushalaim</i>" (Stuhlmüller 22.161). - "It is well known that <i>shalom</i> alludes to the messianic peace that in itself brings joy, prosperity, goodness and abundance." (JP II) - Jerusalem as soul, which should be in peace.
<p>May there be peace within your walls; may there be prosperity within your towers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away" (Rev 21:4). - peace in your soul - Jerusalem as Church; through Church teachings we have peace - Church on watch for heresy
<p>For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I say sincerely: "Peace be within you!"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Church exists for humanity - We are all brothers and sisters, stones supporting one another. "This city, St Gregory the Great says in his <i>Homilies on Ezekiel</i>, "has here a great construction in the customs of the saints. In a building, one stone supports the other, because each stone is set upon another, and the one that supports another is in turn supported by another. This is exactly how in our Holy Church each one is sustaining and

	sustained. The closest support one another, and so it is by using them that the building of charity is erected" (JP II quoting Gregory the Great. See <i>Homilies on Ezekiel</i>).
For the sake of the house of the LORD, our God, I will pray for what is good for you.	- temple - we are God's temple. - need a holy Church.

CONCLUSION

"Jesus departed to the mountain to pray." The apostles departed to the mountain to pray and now you have departed to the mountain to pray. And they all went back down to where they came from. Peter acknowledged the goodness of being on the mountain saying, "Lord, it is good that we are here" (Mt 17:4), but our Lord did not permit this. Rather, they had to descend the mountain and carry this experience of Christ back into the world from which they came. The same holds true for you. You must now go back to your homes, your lives, your family, your friends, your work and your social life. It is not always easy to leave a retreat, but we know we can't stay here forever, we have to take this experience of Jesus back into the world. But we also know that this is God's will. The city on a hill cannot be hidden, a lamp is not lit and set under a bushel basket. Rather, its light must shine before all that they may see your good deeds and give glory to God.

But before you leave, I offer a prayer of blessing. "Once asked by a monk to pray for him and his companions, Barsanuphius responded as follows, including the citation of this verse in his greeting: "My beloved sons, I embrace you in the Lord, entreating him *to protect you from all evil*, and to support you as he did Job, to give you grace as he gave to Joseph, gentleness as to Moses and valor in battle as to Joshua, the son of Nun, mastery of thought as to the judges, victory over enemies as to King David and King Solomon, fertile land as to the Israelites.... May he grant you forgiveness of your sins with the healing of the body as he did to the paralytic. May he save you from the waters as he did Peter and snatch you from troubles as he did Paul and the other Apostles. *May he protect you from every evil*, as his true children, and grant you your heart's desire, for the advantage of your soul and your body, in his name. Amen" (JP II quoting Barsanuphius. See Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, *Epistolario 194: Collana di Testi Patristici, XCIII*, Rome, 1991, pp. 235-236)."

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