

THE DIVINE OFFICE FOR THE LAITY

BY

AN AUGUSTINIAN TERTIARY

And Peter answering said to Jesus, Lord it is good for us to be here; if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles.—Matt. xvii. 4.



NY Catholic who takes his spiritual life seriously must have echoed St Peter's words when the moment comes for leaving the divine presence after Mass or Benediction. Here he would remain, here he would always be. But for him, as for the chosen three, the bright cloud falls and he must descend the mount. He must go down into the everyday world, often like the apostles to find himself faced with an apparently insoluble problem, a demoniac child. This may be a personal grief or a realisation of the spiritual state of the world sharpened by contrast with the timeless peace from which he has freshly come.

And Jesus said, 'This kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting'.

The need for prayer was never more urgent than at this moment. To those aware of this, the thought of the great volume of praise and supplication raised day and night by solitary priests or choirs of monks and nuns is consoling. Many would like to join in this without perhaps realising that it can be done by those living in the world. On the other hand to some the impersonality of the divine Office seems remote from lay problems, a chill offering fitted to those who have 'given up' the world. Closer inspection of the aims and structure of this aspect of the liturgy reveals exactly the contrary.

Our Lord also said, 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst of them'. What then must be the power of the prayer raised by an unnumbered host, incessantly, day and night, year in, year out, all over the world? The majority of the prayers used are our Lord's own. The Son of Man had constant recourse to the age-old psalms, the liturgy of the rite which he came to fulfil.

Recital of the divine Office by the laity is a practice which is daily increasing. To suggest this further step to tertiaries who already say the Little Office of our Lady may seem almost an impertinence. Yet there are among these some for whom the daily recital of what is, from the point of view of time, nearly as long as the divine Office, has become staled by daily repetition. Variation of psalms and

lessons could be a means of freshening their devotion. They would also benefit by a nearer approximation to the liturgical year.

To the Catholic, prayer is not, at bottom, a private affair. As a member of the mystical body of the Church, her seasons are his, her public worship is his too. Moreover his own needs and problems are indissolubly linked with those of the whole world. Problems of conversion and vocation, of matrimonial and other infidelities, of financial worries, the future of children and of loved ones are inextricable from the problems of society in any age. In the psalms we sound every note in the scale of human values and of spiritual states. Joy and sorrow, fidelity and betrayal, faith and despair, burning love of God and thanksgiving for his bounty and mercy, sorrow and repentance, all are here. The call of the psalms is not to man alone but to nature itself, in every aspect and moment to praise the Creator. And so from *Benedicite omnia opera Domini Domino, laudate et superezzaltate eum in saecula*, at Lauds, to the Compline cry, *Qui statis in domo Domini, in atrii domus Dei nostri: in noctibus extollite manus vestras in sancta et benedicite Dominum*, all living creatures are lifted up to God in praise and supplication, not for their own needs alone but for all, for your problems and for mine.

'Lord it is good for us to be here'.

In great moments of realisation of God's presence personal problems are forgotten. In the presence of the loving Father, we know our dear ones are safe, our own difficulties are heeded. Almighty God will not be outdone in generosity. 'Give and it shall be given to you. Good measure, heaped up, overflowing . . .' To those large-minded enough to sink personal needs and sorrows in a general pool of impersonal praise and supplication, the promise will be abundantly fulfilled. Private prayer may become self-centred, it may end in demands and even commands to our Lord. On the other hand liturgical prayer, with its ceaseless stress on divine wisdom and love, takes into consideration the needs not of humanity alone but, if we may so express it, of God himself. For it is also a way of making reparation for the world's lack of praise and honour due to its Maker. Participation in the divine Office may be fruitfully offered in reparation for careless and indifferent priests or for those now in prison for the Faith and deprived of their breviaries.

At the moment of death, the harvest sown through daily faithful participation in the divine Office will be revealed; but even during life its fruits are enjoyed in the personal, spiritual state of the participant. The effect of the discipline of regular periods of set prayer, the detachment attained by the sacrifice of time, and the perpetual renewal of purpose in God's service are of incalculable value. With these comes an ever widening understanding of the truths of our

faith as we follow the course of the liturgical year, an unending fount of meditations, and a deeper knowledge of the Old and New Testaments and their practical application to everyday life. On the secular plane life is enriched by the literary beauty of the psalms. Efforts of consolation in the sufferings of others or words of advice are doubly valuable by words which, repeated in solitude and to God alone, rise automatically to the lips as occasion arises.

Quoniam confortavit securas portarum tuarum, benedixit filiis tuis in te.

No one considering the addition of the divine Office, or a considerable part of it, to an already full day will be under any illusion that this will be easy. Nevertheless it can be done. It is already being done by a great many people.

Last year *La Vie Spirituelle* (January, 1947) gave the result of a questionnaire on the divine Office which the editors had sent to all its readers. Among answers received from priests, nuns and the laity, 110 were from lay folk, both men and women. While these were mainly tertiaries, many were in fact not thus attached. And we may conclude from the answers that while with all these good people the will to say the Office was there, lack of time was the principal difficulty. Ignorance of Latin was a secondary obstacle but this was overcome more easily in various ways.

Viewed in entirety the amount of time which the divine Office takes is formidable. General experience goes to show that while it can be said quickly in forty-five minutes, it takes longer to say it reverently. The Office was meant to be prayed, and therefore even if it were possible to do so, reading it at one sitting is inadvisable. If it be divided into its 'hours', however, time can more easily be found and concentration sustained.

Although such division makes time for the Office easier to arrive at, it must not be imagined that even this will be found easy to fit into the average person's day. Sacrifices will have to be made of leisure, of other interests and often of inclination. Conversely, the sacrifice of saying one or more portions in the interest of health, duty or charity or on the advice of the Director may have to be made. But whichever form the sacrifice may take, it will be found more than worth while. In some extraordinary way the willing soul is often helped by God to get more value out of working hours or favouring circumstances arise directly traceable to divine providence. 'Give and it shall be given to you'. It will usually be found necessary to give up permanently some secular hobby or interest or to curtail time spent in normal social activities, in calls or at cards. In any case the cost should be counted before the choice is made and then a horary worked out and the hours said with as much punctuality and regu-

larity as possible¹. . . Unpunctuality in God's service is irreverent. Blessed is that servant whom his Lord finds watching.

The joy of saying the divine Office before the Blessed Sacrament or in some oratory is rarely possible for the layman. Much of the recitation may have to be done in buses, trains or tubes and in times snatched between appointments. While the difficulties of this are obvious and enormous, persistence in the face of noise and distraction is usually rewarded by the graces asked for in the *Aperi Domine* (the opening invocation)—*ut digne, attente ac devote hoc officium recitare valeam*. The dangers of self-consciousness or ostentation must be guarded against. It is surprising how little notice fellow travellers take of a man or woman seated quietly in a corner reading a book. If the intention is offered for the eternal salvation of fellow-travellers natural self-consciousness soon vanishes. If the Breviary is found awkward to carry about, a *Psalterium* containing the Common of the *Feriae* and *Sanctorum* or the small *Horae Diurnae* will be found useful. The former is very convenient and inconspicuous. The collects for the day hours can be memorised or written out on a piece of paper or even prayed by intention.

If for reasons of charity, duty or health certain hours are omitted, a decade of the Rosary, a psalm or even an ejaculation might be substituted. Here we find the value of the set time for the hours. If one or more have to be admitted, there need be no sense of strain. In general, for those not canonically obliged, hours omitted need not be made up. The omission can be offered up as an act of obedience to God's will.

The practice of certain religious orders who have to say the hours at times unrelated to their general tenour (e.g., Compline at mid-day) need not be followed by the layman who is free to recite them at the appropriate times. Ideally, they should be said at three-hourly intervals during the twenty-four hours. Since this is out of the question a method such as the following could be recommended:

Matins, (1, 2, or 3 nocturns) on rising.

Lauds, as thanksgiving after Mass or Holy Communion.

Prime and Terce before noon, as convenient.

Sext and None in the afternoon, as convenient.

Vespers after work.

Compline as night prayers.

The length of Matins need not be a difficulty if abridged as suggested above. Rising during the night to say Office is not, as a rule, commended by Directors.

¹ That this should be submitted to the Director or to some spiritual adviser ^{goes} without saying.

The language difficulty is not really insuperable. Recitation of the divine Office does not, as a rule, attract the un-liturgically-minded. Those who habitually use the Missal will be to a large extent on the way to understanding Latin. If the psalms and the scripture portions of Matins are read in translation at first and later in Latin on alternate days, it is surprising how quickly understanding develops. The homilies and the lessons about the saints at Matins are difficult for even good Latinists, and here our Bibles will not help. Nevertheless, persistence in reading these, even if at first only a word here and there is recognised, will eventually be rewarded as the Latin becomes more familiar. If these cannot be followed with devotion, the intention can be offered. If we love the Church we will love her language and try to learn it. A Breviary in English is to be had, but is, I believe, not complete. In any case so much of the spirit of any work is lost in translation that the enthusiast for the liturgy will usually prefer to struggle on, learning as time passes. Manuals of, and courses in, Church Latin are available. Among the former the excellent *Legendo* (Rushworth & Draper, 6s.) helps to lay a good foundation of the necessary grammar in an amazingly short time. Lovers of the liturgy, especially those whose time is limited, will soon discover or organise such societies as that of the *Magnificat*, in which the Office can be shared by a group. There are many ways of approximating to a full participation in this official prayer of the Church, and the laity will benefit greatly from this very liturgical practice.

THE LADDER OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

BY

HONORIUS OF AUTUN¹

[Honorius of Autun c. 1125, a contemporary and fellow-countryman of Saint Bernard, calls himself '*ecclesiae presbyter et scholasticus*'. A seventeenth-century editor of his work '*Inevitabile*' prefaces it with the following eulogy:

'About the one thousand and eighty-seventh year from the passing of Christ our Saviour from this world to the Father, there flourished in the duchy of Burgundy a certain priest Honorius, worthy indeed to be crowned with glory and honour, and shining among the clergy as a planet among stars.

'He was deeply versed in the Sacred Scriptures and most learned in secular knowledge; a man deeply erudite, subtle of mind, lucid

¹ Migne, P.L. 172. Translated by R. Wildy.