

### 3. Exploring Prayer: 'Praying with the church'



#### Some basics

Your prayer is expressive of your relationship with God, and will be different because you're different to anyone else. It will reflect your temperament and personality type, your values, your theology, your place in life, and so on. Prayer also consists of a lot of things, and can't be reduced to techniques or schemes. However, there are factors that can help with our praying.

- *Prayer Place* – It's helpful to set aside a space for prayer. This can be as simple as having a quiet space in the house or garden where you can go. Jesus seems to have often gone outside (Luke 6:12); to a deserted place (Mark 1:35); he also recommended praying indoors in complete privacy (Matthew 6:6).

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Origen wrote: ' Any place can be suitable for prayer.... But if you want to pray without being disturbed, we would do well, if possible, to find a special place in our home, a consecrated place, so to speak – and pray there.' A private place has the advantage of giving us the freedom to pray how we wish: to move around, shout, cry, laugh, be silent, or talk aloud. But the right place is the place that works for you.

- *Prayer Time and Commitment* – Like the place you choose, the right time of the day is what works for you, but do set a specific time aside and guard it carefully. The demands of daily life are such that if we don't set a time aside it won't happen. Some might say that they don't like scheduling prayer because they want it to be spontaneous, but if you think about it, that's not how we treat other important things in our life. We don't leave them to chance. We set a specific time aside for them. If two people want to get to know each other they arrange a meeting time and place. Of course spontaneity occurs. Times of prayer will often surprise us by coming unexpectedly. But unless there is a commitment to a time for prayer, then our prayer will probably not develop.

*Experiment* – work out the best time(s) for you.

- *Silence* – Allowing silence is also important. The still small voice of God is difficult to hear in the babble of the world around us. The myriad 'voices' of radio, television, newspaper, the Internet, advertising all shout at us and distract us from hearing God. So, an absence of noise and distraction is important. Take the phone off the hook and put your cell phone on silent.

Perhaps tell others in your house you're praying and ask that you not be disturbed.

- Time, place and silence are not only important to hear the voice of God, but also because they require us to make an effort, and so we place a value on praying. This is being intentional – doing something because it's important and valuable to us.

## **Prayer of the church**

In the Anglican tradition there are, classically, two broad elements in our prayer life: the prayer of the church and private prayer. We often treat them as separate things, but they're very much linked – one flows into the other and nourishes the other.

The prayer of the church is something we take part in when we attend corporate worship – such as Eucharist or Evensong, and also includes what we call the Daily Offices (Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer). The corporate prayer of the church links us with the prayer of the wider church, and reminds us that we are the Body of Christ – joined with sisters and brothers throughout the world and throughout time. Our private prayer is obviously linked to the prayer of the church, because we are linked to the church, and so we can't really separate the two out.

## **Why say the Daily Office?**

Christians who say the Daily Office frequently find themselves filled with awareness that they're handing their worship, at its final "Amen," on to other Christians in the next time zone or in another place – like relay runners passing on a lighted torch. They're a part of a continuous cascade of praise before the throne of God.

The story is told of a parish priest who every day went into the Church to say Morning Prayer. One day a visitor joined him, and after noticing that no one else joined them, asked the priest how he managed always saying it by himself. He replied: "But I never say it by myself. Thousands upon thousands join me. I say it with the church throughout the world and we're joined by the saints in heaven."

It's also a discipline that can help us to pray even when we don't feel like it. When we have little energy, or are feeling down, the words of the liturgy carries us and we become part of something far bigger than us. It takes us out of

ourselves. I may be feeling depressed but then I'm faced with a psalm of praise and gratitude. That often helps to change my feelings, but even if it doesn't, it leads me to offer prayers of thanks and celebration for others. Likewise, I may be very happy and then read a Psalm of Lament – so I offer the Psalm as a prayer for those for whom that is their present reality. It's a reminder that we are part of something far bigger than our individual selves.

## **What is the Office?**

The Daily Office has a various names and forms. These include: Divine Office, Liturgy of the Hours, Breviary, Matins and Evensong, or Daily Services.

The Daily Office is a form of liturgical prayer that takes psalms, readings from the Bible and prayers, and uses them as short acts of worship at fixed times during the day. The vast majority of the Daily Office comes from the Bible, or is a direct response to readings from the Bible.

Saying the Office involves praying words that can be found in a number of books or on websites, but we'll focus on the offices as we find them in *A New Zealand Prayer Book – He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*.

## **Some history**

No matter the name, the form of the prayer is similar. The Daily Office is a form of liturgical prayer at fixed times during the day (commonly morning and evening, as well as noon and bedtime) which has origins in the Judaism out of which Christianity comes. The psalmist wrote 'Seven times a day do I praise you' (Ps 119:164) – this is the pattern of prayer Jesus and his disciples knew, and which was carried forward into the early church and to us today.

From its earliest days the Christian community incorporated the psalms in their prayers; and the Psalter has remained the core of the daily offices ever since. The shape of the Daily Office was, over time, enlarged, especially by monastic communities which saw prayer, and unceasing prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17) as their primary call from God. Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480–547) was a particular influence and his 'little rule for beginners' has influenced the form of the office from that time forward.

The English reformation saw the development of the *Book of Common Prayer*, in which Thomas Cranmer combined a number of offices together, resulting in the familiar Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, which became central services of

the Church of England and later the Anglican Communion. In modern times liturgical renewal within the Anglican Communion has resulted in new, contemporary forms of the daily office – both the ‘public’ offices of Morning and Evening Prayer, and the ‘daily offices’ that appear in books such as *A New Zealand Prayer Book*.

### **How to say the Office**

*What you will need:*

- *A New Zealand Prayer Book*
- A Bible (a clear modern version will be best)
- The Lectionary (a booklet containing tables of readings for each day of the year – you will want this if you want to pray the same psalms and readings as others in the church – alternatively you can choose your own)

The Lectionary is available free of charge on line:

<http://www.anglican.org.nz/Resources/Lectionary-and-Worship>

or perhaps *The One Year Bible*.

Bookmarks for the Bible (and prayer book if it doesn’t have it)

Time – around 15-20 minutes for Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer

Place – somewhere you will be undisturbed

Quiet – somewhere you can concentrate on being with God.

*Some suggestions:*

- Begin by marking the psalm(s) and collect (prayer for the day) in the prayer book, the readings in the Bible.
- Settle down by breathing quietly.
- Pray – offer the time to God, and ask God to help you hear.
- Read the office and possibly the Bible readings aloud, even if you’re by yourself. At least form the words with your mouth, even if you say them silently. This helps to keep your concentration.
- Don’t worry if you miss something, do something ‘wrong’ (like saying ‘Alleluia’ in Lent) or are confused to start off with. It will become clearer with time and practice.
- Stick with it for a month – perhaps saying just Morning Prayer or just Evening Prayer, or alternating them. If you alternate them, use the readings for one or another consistently (e.g., always use the morning readings, whether you say Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer), so you get a flow of scripture.
- Try to say it at the same time each day. This helps to establish the practice and your commitment to it.
- Ask for help – a priest will be able to help (she or he already says the office).
- Remember – the Holy Spirit prays within you. Even when it seems dry, hurried or pointless – just words – you are sitting before God, within God, and offering your whole self to God.

- Prepare your intercessions – make a list of the things you want to pray about and perhaps use the cycles of prayer (e.g. Anglican Missions, Diocesan, Anglican Communion).
- Say the office with someone else from time to time – it is a wonderful thing to share the office with one or more people, reminding us that we are a praying community.

*Some advice for beginners and those not used to a prayer book:*

When we first pick up a prayer book the details can overwhelm us. Even more: if we are not used to praying liturgically, starting out can feel unnatural.

When you are first beginning to drive (let's make it a manual car). Turning left appears something like this: indicate left, slow down, check rear-view mirror, brake, clutch in, out of gear 4, into gear 2, clutch out, check left and right, and straight ahead traffic turning right across my path, check traffic lights, turn, accelerate, clutch in, change to gear 3, check indicator has turned off automatically...

When you have been driving for a while, you don't even notice you are doing these things. They become automatic. Your focus is on the driving, and enjoying the journey, including the people with you in the car. When you start praying the Daily Office (or liturgical prayer generally) the focus can be on the details. After time, the details will rightly move into the background and this form of praying with the church will come to the fore.

Another example. New shoes feel stiff and awkward when you first purchase them. At first the focus is on the uncomfortable shoes. As we regularly wear them, we cease to notice the shoes. Even are unaware of our feet. And just enjoy the walking. If you have never worn shoes at all before – wearing shoes can appear very unnatural. “God made us without shoes” (we should always pray extemporarily). It takes time to find that shoes enhance our God-given walking. It takes time to find liturgy enhances our God-given praying.<sup>1</sup>

- **Where to find the various services in *A New Zealand Prayer Book***

*The Daily Services* – (Daily Office: Morning and Evening) page 58, with some helpful introductory notes on page 54

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<sup>1</sup> From – <http://liturgy.co.nz/ofthehours/introduction.html>

## Daily Devotions – page 104

*These are for those who wish to base their worship on the New Testament, and whose time for prayer may be limited.*

*This order may be used by itself or as a brief form of daily worship, with the inclusion of a Scripture reading or readings.*

*Each week the seven sections of the Lord's Prayer are covered, with a morning and evening devotion for each day.*

*The same pattern is followed throughout:*

- a short opening, followed by a Gospel reflection, based on one or more Gospel sayings;*
- after a brief meditation, a reflection on the epistles;*
- the daily reading of Scripture may follow;*
- the order concludes with prayer.*

## Midday Prayer – page 147

*Prayer at midday provides a way to consecrate the day at its centre and to realise the presence of God in the heart of life.*

## Night Prayer – page 167

*The offering of prayer late in the evening, by laity, religious orders or clergy, often called Compline, has sometimes been described as the 'goodnight prayer of the Church'. It rounds off the day and prepares us for a quiet night. As the psalmist wrote:*

*I lie down in peace and take rest my rest for it is in God alone that I dwell unafraid.*

*Night Prayer derives its content from the wisdom of the centuries in Scripture and above all in the psalms, but also from contemporary Christian experience of God. It celebrates the awareness that each of us who tries to pray is a part of the human whole. So we are taken over the threshold from daytime, not in a mood of self-centred spirituality, but as representatives of humanity, acknowledging our creaturehood before God.*

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