

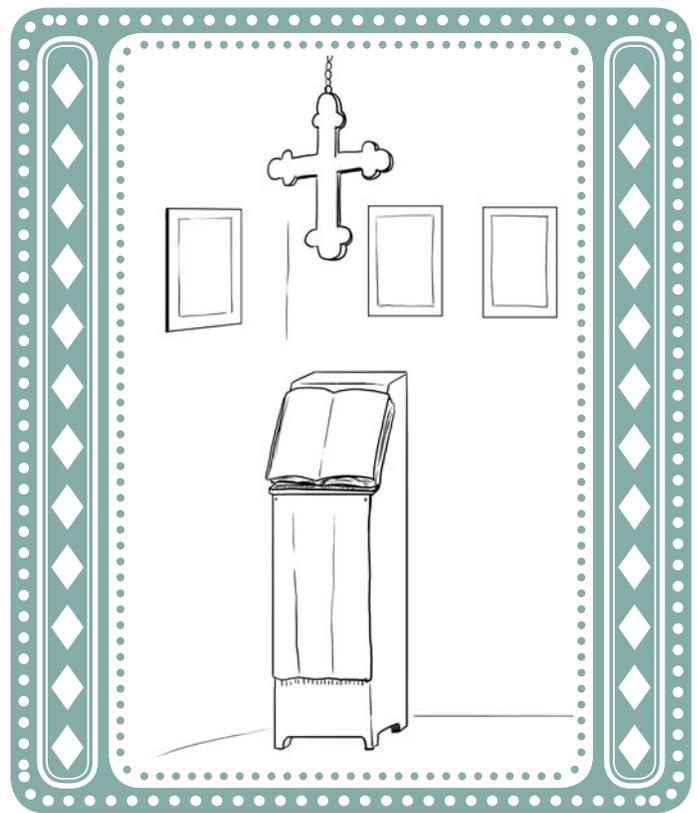
# Maronite Monks of Adoration

April 2016

## To PRAY With The Church

In Part Four of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read the following: “Great is the mystery of faith! The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles Creed and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy, so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father. This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. **This relationship is prayer.**”

Prayer is the oxygen of the Christian life. If we never talked with other people we would have no relationship with them and be in effect recluses. The same goes with God. No prayer (speaking with God) means no relationship with Him and hence no Christian life. Pope St. John Paul II would often lament the superficiality of much of Christian life in this modern era and for him this superficiality was the direct result of the neglect of prayer in peoples’ lives. To go back to that ridiculous headline of the *New York Daily News* – “This Won’t Help!” – concerning people praying for an end to the evils we are now experiencing, if more people were engaged in heartfelt prayer, many of these evils would not be taking place. The lives of the Saints especially demonstrate this. Look at the good accomplished by soon to be canonized Blessed Mother Theresa. She and her sisters live fully what Our Lord said in chapter 25 of the Gospel according to St. Matthew: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink” etc. Their love for the poorest of the poor flowed directly from their prayer life. This prayer life cultivated in them a burning love for God which then flowed into an intense love of neighbor. Not some sentimental superficial do-goodism done from a distance but a love whereby they see the person of Christ in each and every one of them and literally pick them up to care for them. That’s the power of prayer and (the *Daily News* notwithstanding) will “help” far more than some coercive government wealth



redistribution program. In short, prayer will change our lives and then we in turn can minister to the world as Christ did.

While all prayer ultimately should come from the heart, as human beings with a weakened human nature due to Original Sin, our prayer life also needs some structure to it. In this newsletter we will propose for your consideration two models which reach back deep into Christian tradition: one from the Desert Fathers and the other being “The Liturgy of the Hours” which is the official prayer of the Church.

For starters we should have what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in part 4 about “Christian Prayer” refers to as a “favorable place for prayer.” It says: “For personal prayer, this can be a ‘prayer corner’ with the Sacred Scriptures and icons, in order to be there, in secret, before our Father.” This prayer corner (see illustration) should be as secluded and peaceful as possible where you can blot out the noise of the world in order to pray to your Father “in secret.” If you want to live a very important and ancient Christian tradition in your prayer, try to have your prayer corner facing towards the **east**. From the earliest days Christians faced east in both liturgical and private prayer because

of two important symbolisms.

The original "Paradise" was in the east: the Garden of Eden, our original home. Because of their sin our First Parents were expelled from paradise and sent into exile. By facing east in prayer we are expressing our longing to return to our true home. The Scriptures remind us that this earth is not our true home; we're just passing through. But our true home is not the original Garden of Eden but the Kingdom of Heaven where Christ reigns in glory. Also by facing east in prayer we are keeping watch in joyful expectation of Christ's Second Coming in glory. Unfortunately, due to an overemphasis on sociology (the here and now "community") we've lost much of that symbolism.

This orientation of the prayer corner toward the east is best indicated with a crucifix, as has been the custom from the earliest days. On the right of the crucifix you can hang an icon of Christ and on the left side an icon of the Blessed Mother as well as favorite saints. On a prie-dieu or prayer stand you can have the Bible, the Psalter, prayer books and a rosary. With this setup you can turn your home into a "domestic church."

In praying like the Desert Fathers, the prayer *par-excellence* would be the Psalms. The Psalms constitute the oldest formal prayer there is dating back to the period of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Psalms contain literally prayers for all occasions (joy, sadness, petition etc.). The Desert Fathers would often pray all 150 Psalms in a single day. Many would even memorize the entire Psalter by heart and would recite them throughout the day, particularly when working. Interestingly the Fathers would pray the Psalms aloud as opposed to silent reading. For us today attempting all 150 Psalms in one day would probably be beyond our capabilities. A good practice would be 12 Psalms in the morning and 12 Psalms in the evening. Some of the longer Psalms (Psalm 119 for example) can be broken up into segments. Important to note is that the Psalms are *poetry* and not prose and therefore the translation used here matters more than perhaps than in other books of the Bible. As Catholic apologist Dr. Peter Kreeft says, "In the original, the *Psalms* are stylized and poetic, not prosaic. The old *Douay* or *King James* versions were more accurate and more literal than most modern ones. The *Revised*

*Standard Version* is a good blend of modern clarity and ancient beauty. The *Revised Grail Psalms* published by Conception Abbey would also be an excellent choice (Avoid the "politically correct" versions).

The other option would be the *Liturgy of the Hours* which is the official prayer of the Church. Formerly this prayer was known as the *Breviary* and thought to be just for priests. But the Second Vatican Council stressed that this is the prayer of the *entire* Church and not just restricted to priests. Because it is the prayer of the whole Church, then when we pray it we unite ourselves with the entire Mystical Body of Christ in offering the prayer of Jesus Christ to His Heavenly Father.

The Liturgy of the Hours has its origins in the Temple of Jerusalem liturgy where the Psalms were prayed at the third (9am), sixth (12 noon) and ninth (3pm) hours. While a thorough history of the Hours lies beyond this newsletter's scope, nonetheless its importance should not be minimized. We present now the current format along with what each "hour" represents.

*Office of Readings / Vigils.* A vigil of prayers along with a Scripture reading and a patristic (Church Father) reading which is prayed at mid-night or very early in the morning (just before dawn). By praying this hour one keeps vigil or "watches" for the Lord's Second Coming. *Morning Prayer / Lauds.* A prayer of praise to begin the day. It commemorates the Resurrection of Christ. *Midday Prayer* divided into Mid-Morning (9am) Midday (12pm) and Mid-Afternoon (3pm) – the times could be approximate and not necessarily on the stroke of the hour. These prayers commemorate in their order: the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Jesus' Crucifixion, and the death of Jesus. These prayers are also called the "Little Hours" since they are shorter than the others. Next would be *Evening Prayer / Vespers* prayed around 5 or 6pm and which commemorates the institution of the Eucharist. Finally comes, *Night Prayer / Compline* which is prayed just before one retires for the night. Morning Prayer / Lauds and Evening Prayer / Vespers serve as the "hinges" for the day.

For the beginner to this prayer a good practice would be to start with Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer and in this way consecrate or make holy the entire day. As you gain experience you then can

add the various other hours to your prayer schedule. Do not let all this intimidate you. For the beginner a one-volume edition, often referred to as the “Prayer of Christians” is available from both the Catholic Book Publishing Company and the Daughters of St. Paul. For those more experienced or who gradually want to include the other hours the four volume “Liturgy of the Hours” is available.

Remember again that prayer is the oxygen of the Christian life. Pope St. John Paul II on numerous oc-

casions reminded us that in these days, when the Devil has been active like he’s never been before, the Christian life must be lived **intensely** or it will not be lived at all. In praying the Psalms, like the Desert Fathers, or the Liturgy of the Hours you are not praying alone but uniting yourselves with countless Christians throughout the world. It will take a lot of “prayer-warriors” to defeat the Devil. Here’s a chance to become one. ✠