

## Praying the "Opus Dei"

**OPUS DEI, THE WORK OF GOD**, was given by St Benedict (480-550) to *The Divine Office*. He said this was a monk's special duty of prayer, seven times a day. It developed from Hebrew synagogue services so often mentioned in the Gospels.

With adaptations for today, the Office is obligatory for priests and some Religious orders.

*The Divine Office* is made up of psalms, hymns, long and short Bible readings, readings from the Fathers, plus collects and other short prayers, and usually matching a particular time of day,

Long before Vatican II, way back in the Middle Ages, evening devotions in parish churches were Vespers in Latin, Early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was also a practice in Australian parishes, plus Benediction. By the 1950s, the Rosary had tended to replace Vespers.

Since Vatican II, this "Work of God" is recited by growing numbers of the laity. In some parishes, Morning Praises are recited before daily Mass.

Of course, *Opus Dei* is also the name of a world-wide Personal Prelature of priests and laity, a lay apostolate grouping founded in 1928/1950 by St José Maria Escrivá, and very important for Australia.

When full communion with the Catholic Church comes soon to "Firm in Faith" Anglo-Catholics and Traditional Anglicans, any Catholic will be free to take part in their Matins (Morning Prayer) and Evensong (Evening Prayer) as well as their Mass.

### THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

**THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS** is a new name added to the names *The Divine Office* and *The Breviary*, and all three are used today.

The old editions of a priest's *Breviarium Romanum* usually had four volumes, though there was a *Totum* in one volume. They had to be in Latin. A weak clerical pun reckoned that 'Opus Dei' had become 'Onus Diei', that the 'Work of God' had become the 'Burden of the Day!' Priests were (and are) bound to recite the Office with the same sort of grave obligation binding all Catholics to take part in Sunday Mass.

The current English translation of *The Liturgy of the Hours* is in three volumes or four in the Latin. There is also a one-volume edition in English used by a growing number of the devout lay faithful that lacks the Office of Readings.

Long before the 1911 reform by Pope St Pius X, there were four encyclopedic volumes of *The Roman Breviary* in English for the laity who had the Time, Piety and Money. Its Tridentine Matins had twelve psalms, not nine, and not bits of psalms either, but with some run together only counting as one!

Before Vatican II, Pope Pius XII allowed a choice of a new Latin translation of the Psalms from Hebrew, and Blessed Pope John XXIII ordered a simplification of the rubrics in 1960.

After Vatican II's 1963 *Liturgy Constitution*, from 1964, priests were allowed to recite the office in the vernacular from a 1963 three volume Breviary with twin columns for Latin and English and extensive notes, headings and prompts. It was a magnificent work of great piety, learning and teaching skill.

In 1971, Pope Paul VI radically revised and shortened *The Divine Office* and spread the psalms over four weeks.

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI gave permission for any priest to use the 1962 Latin *Missale Romanum*, the old *Roman Ritual* for all sacraments and sacramentals, and included *Breviarium Romanum* - which surely includes its English translation?

### THE OPUS DEI TODAY

**THE PURPOSE** of the Opus Dei, "**The Liturgy of the Hours**" is to sanctify time. Today 'sacred time' is divided into five "hours"; Office of Readings, Morning Prayer, Little Hour (s), Evening Prayer and Night Prayer. Alas! Some new hymns are omitted in the English.

Also, there used to be "warming up prayers" before recitation. Part 1 (below) still appears in Latin on a slip-in prayer card in the current Latin editions of Pope Paul VI's Divine Office. It does not, however, appear within the books themselves, nor in any current English office book.

#### Part 1, to God

##### OPEN, MY MOUTH, O LORD,

to bless Thy holy Name;  
cleanse my heart from all vain, evil and alien thoughts;  
enlighten my understanding, inflame my will,  
that I may be able to recite this Office  
worthily, attentively and devoutly,  
and merit to be heard  
before the face of Thy Divine Majesty,  
through Christ our Lord, Amen.

#### Part 2, to Christ, the Incarnate Sun of God

**O LORD**, in union with that divine intention  
with which Thou Thyself didst on earth  
offer praises unto God, I offer these Hours unto Thee.

#### COMMENT

The above are private translations from the Latin. **Note the word "recite"**. It suggests we might *move our lips* and mouth the words in that old style which was once obligatory. After all, it is the Prayer of the whole Church even when recited on one's own. In so many places in the Church on earth, including our own country, the members of the Church have urgent need of prayer by the whole Communion of Saints.

#### FOR ALTAR SERVERS before & after Mass

**Serra international** for Priestly Vocations has adapted Part 1 (above) for altar servers to pray **before Mass**:-

##### OPEN MY MOUTH, O LORD,

to bless Your Holy Name.  
Cleanse my heart from all evil and distracting thoughts.  
Enlighten my understanding, inflame my will,  
that I may serve worthily at Your holy altar.  
O Mary, Mother of Christ the High Priest,  
obtain for me the most important grace  
of knowing my vocation in life.  
Grant me a true spirit of faith and humble obedience  
so that I may ever behold the priest  
as a representative of God and willingly follow him  
in the Way, the Truth and the Life of Christ. Amen.

Serra has also adapted St Bonaventure for **after Mass**:-

**O LORD JESUS CHRIST**, Eternal High Priest,  
I thank You for the privilege  
of having served at the holy altar of Your Sacrifice,  
Now as I put aside the garments of that service,  
I ask that I may at all times think of You.  
May I ever seek You and find You,  
may I always follow You,  
may Your priestly spirit be in my heart  
and Your Holy Name on my lips,  
and to Your praise and glory  
may every work be done.  
Ever ready in Your service,  
May I always know and do Your will in all things  
and, by Your grace, persevere unto the end. Amen.

## Praise

**THE** *Opus Dei*, the Work of God, does not so much mean the Work done by God, which is creation and redemption, as our work for God by praising Him for creating everything and redeeming us,

In Hebrew, a psalm meant a stored song of praise sung to a harp. Also, it anticipated Gregorian chant.

In the Latin psalter (i.e. the 150 Psalms arranged for the various Hours of the day) there is often a verb *confiteri*: it is variously translated and can mean all of the following: to **confess, acknowledge, praise, give thanks, give glory**. Indeed, even in English, "confess" often, means much more than admitting our sins. Rather, it is our "admitting" the glory of God. Thus it includes praise, adoration, thanksgiving, petition and sorrow for our sins,

Such praise of God lifts us out of ourselves. There is no place for self-centredness or self-pity. We recite psalms to be of one will with Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the mysterious Man of the psalms, starting with Psalm 1:1: "Blessed is the Man who has..." He Himself said:

These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the law of Moses and the prophets **and the psalms** must be fulfilled. The he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

Luke 24:44-45.

Our Lord often quoted the Psalms, On the Cross, He prayed Psalm 22[21] and quoted Psalm 31[30]:5.

When we pray the psalms about David's repentance for his own and the people's sins, we still understand them as said by Christ Himself, because He suffered on behalf of those who wrote them and on behalf of us who pray them in sorrow for our own personal sins.

We join Him, too, in the psalms of the adoration of God, for Christ is our Great High Priest and Mediator,

The Office of Readings (formerly Matins) has sermons from the great Fathers of the Church like St Augustine of Hippo and St Ambrose of Milan which applied the psalms to Christ and to us — all very powerful piety!

In the new translations of the English Missal, expected Easter, 2011, there will be repairs to the "bleachings" and "serious theological problems" in the present texts — Archbishop Mark Coleridge's words in Perth, early February, 2010. We might hope, too, for corrections in Responsorial Psalms and Entrance and Communion Verses, and translations of the Latin Offertory Antiphons in the *Graduale Simplex*, and the psalms in it for these three sets of antiphons.

## Contrition

**CONTRITION** is sincere sorrow  
for having offended God,  
with hatred for our sins

and the intention of not sinning again. [CFC AE II 331]

### SHORT ACT OF CONTRITION

Some good folk with the spiritual maturity to read the *Handouts* might not have realized that the Short Act of

Contrition was introduced for 7-year olds making their first Confessions before First Holy Communion. It was always meant as a stop-gap measure, and never intended for older children or adults. It was meant to give way to the Long Act before leaving Primary School.

Here are two formulas:-

**O MY GOD**, I am very sorry  
that I have sinned against Thee  
because Thou art so good  
and, with Thy help, I will not sin again.

### LONG ACT OF CONTRITION

**O MY GOD**, I am sorry and beg pardon  
for all my sins,  
and detest them above all things,  
because they deserve Thy dreadful punishments,  
because they have crucified my loving Saviour,  
Jesus Christ, and most of all,  
because they offend Thine infinite goodness;  
and I firmly resolve by the help of Thy grace,  
never to offend Thee again  
and carefully to avoid the occasions of sin. Amen,

### COMMENTS

The Short Act of Contrition has "I am very sorry *that*..." where "that" is a conjunction introducing the noun clause whose verb is "sinned".

The Long Act of Contrition, however, has "I am sorry and beg pardon *for*..." where "for" is a preposition governing the noun "sins". This is actually simpler.

The Short Act also has an adverbial clause qualifying the verbs of both principal and noun clauses together. It is a grammatical jungle for youngsters.

As a consequence, the Long Act is much more robust grammatically than the Short Act. If a word or phrase is left out, the Long Act can still make sense, but the Short Act can be reduced to absurdities:-

O my God, I am very sorry... you are so good...

Or if the conjunctions "that" and "because" are swapped, or if they get added to, or if there is a second "that" instead of a "because" or vice-versa, then:-

O my God, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you and that you are so good...

Besides, the Long Act has two more motives, and they are easier to understand than the more abstract "so good". They can be pictured in the imagination.

The Short Act attracts tinkerers who say, "will try not to sin again", yet they are content with the Long Act and its "with the help of Thy grace" as a sufficient recognition of penitential weakness.

Finally, ponder the *Opus Dei* psalms 51 [50] and 130[129] about our sins, and 22[21] and 69[68] on our Lord's suffering for sinners.

### SAYING SORRY IN DAILY LIFE

Contrast "I'm sorry." (Note the full stop)  
or "I'm sorry that..." (with a noun clause)  
or "I'm sorry because..." (with an adverbial clause)  
OR "I regret that..." (someone else's sins),

Regarding the last, we can regret other people's sins but we cannot really "say sorry" for them because "I'm sorry" is strictly personal for my own sins - though ill-gotten grains may require restitution.