



# RELIGIOUS LIFE

*“O God, you are my God— it is you I seek!*

*“For you my soul thirsts, in a land parched, lifeless, and without water. I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory. For your love is better than life; my lips shall ever praise you! I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands, calling on your name.*

*“I think of you upon my bed, I remember you through the watches of the night. You indeed are my savior, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy. My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me.”*

*- Psalm 63:1-6, 8-9*

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## TEACH

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### WHAT IS THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS?

The official prayer of the Church is called the Liturgy of the Hours. It is scripture (mostly psalms) and other prayers that can be prayed out loud with a group of people, such as monks and nuns, or individually by priests, married people, and single people. Besides the psalms, there are also Bible readings and even advice and stories from saints and other holy people.

There are five “hours” throughout the day when the Liturgy of the Hours is prayed. In this instance, an hour doesn’t really mean 60 minutes, it means a certain time of the day. The times for prayer are: morning, mid-day, evening, and night, plus one other time that can be chosen.

People have been praying the psalms at specific times throughout the day since before Jesus was born! You can be sure that no matter what time of the day it is, there is someone around the world who is praying the Liturgy of the Hours.

Consecrated brothers and sisters and priests get up dawn (some at 3 am!) to pray the first “hour” of the day. The Liturgy of the Hours is often chanted (which is a kind of melodic singing) by religious brothers and sisters. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours a big part of being a consecrated brother or sister.

### YOUR OWN SPIN

- Why do you think prayer is scheduled for certain times throughout the day?
- Have you heard monks or nuns chanting in real life? Describe the sound.
- How is it that when religious participate in the Liturgy of the Hours they are part of something “larger than themselves”?
- How do you think praying several times a day like this would change your life?



*Benedictine monks in Vancouver, Canada chat the Liturgy of the Hours.*

*Still shot from the film “This Side of Eden,” produced by Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation*



## ACTIVITY

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Now you will have an opportunity to join in the Liturgy of the Hours by praying one of the psalms like monks do in chapel.

- Your teacher will divide the class into two groups, A and B, and the groups face each other.
- The groups will take turns reading the verses of Psalm 121.
- Group A reads the first verse; then Group B reads the next verse, and so on.



*Religious brothers and sisters use a special book called a breviary to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.*

Begin the prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**Teacher:** *God come to my assistance.*

**Students:** *Lord make haste to help me.*

### PSALM 121

**Group A:** I raise my eyes toward the mountains. From whence shall come my help? My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth.

**Group B:** He will not allow your foot to slip; or your guardian to sleep. Behold, the guardian of Israel never slumbers nor sleeps.

**Group A:** The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. By day the sun will not strike you, nor the moon by night.

**Group B:** The LORD will guard you from all evil; he will guard your soul. The LORD will guard your coming and going both now and forever.

**Group A:** Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

**Group B:** As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

**Teacher:** *May the Lord bless us, protect us from evil, and bring us to everlasting life.*

**Students:** *Amen (make the sign of the cross)*



## READING

### HEARING CHANT FOR THE FIRST TIME

The first time that I ever heard monks chanting in person I thought I had died and gone to heaven. As a college student far from home, I was going to be away from my family for Easter. So, on a whim, two friends and I drove to St. Meinrad, Indiana to spend Holy Week at a Benedictine Monastery. One of my friends, Dave, had just learned to drive, and he wasn't exactly good at it. Throughout that nerve-racking car ride, thoughts of possibly dying filled my mind. When at last the monastery steeple came into view, I breathed a sigh of relief, very anxious and grateful to step out of the car.

As we walked wonderingly into the monastery chapel, the sound of prayers echoed in the vast church and made my heart rise almost right up to heaven. Now thoughts of heaven filled my mind. Although I can be a very fidgety person, I felt still and at peace. As the incense swirled upwards in the air so my thoughts went to God. The monks were chanting the Liturgy of the Hours with steady melodic voices that blended seamlessly into a beautiful prayer. No one was trying to show off or stand out; they were just there to pray together, as they do five times a day, every day. It felt so simple, so timeless, and so safe. The beautiful song had such a clear purpose—to praise God.

When prayers were over, I got the chance to speak with some of the brothers. I was expecting them to be perfectly angelic, but as I visited with them that day and the rest of the week, I found that they were just ordinary people, holy and wise, yes, but still very human. They were down to earth, liked to have fun, and had plenty of little faults and varieties of personalities just as you would find in any group of people. But the most inspiring thing was that five times a day these normal people, like you and me, were participating in something far bigger than themselves, something with a history more than a thousand years old, something that crosses land, sea, and time and reaches to God—the Liturgy of the Hours.



*Monks chanting the Liturgy of the Hours. The sound of chant is especially inspiring inside large churches, where the sound echoes from the high arched ceiling.*

### STEP IN HIS SHOES

- Why did thoughts of heaven fill the author's mind as he entered the monastery chapel?
- The author at first thought monks would be somber and always serious, but he soon realized they are normal people! Have you ever met monks or nuns? What were they like?
- If not, how do you imagine monks and nuns?



## EXPLORATION

### DESIGN A CHAPEL FOR A RELIGIOUS ORDER

Use your imagination to design a monastery chapel. Make your sketch like a blueprint with lots of details. For ideas, see the photos below.

These religious sisters face each other while praying. The tabernacle is at the end of the center aisle.



*These religious sisters face each other while praying. The tabernacle is at the end of the center aisle.*



*This is the interior of Grand Seminary in Montreal. It was built for a very large number of seminarians to be able to pray together.*

## VISUAL ART



*“The Virgin in Prayer”*

Our Blessed Mother Mary is admired greatly by people in the religious life. Both sisters and brothers look to her as an example to show them how to love Jesus and to seek him in prayer.

- Why is there light on Mary’s face?
- Where is the light in the picture coming from?
- How does Mary look here as she prays?
- How can this image be a model for people in prayer?



## MEDITATIVE PRAYER



“David the Shepherd”

by Elizabeth Jane Gardner

“O God, you are my God— it is you I seek! ...For you my soul thirsts, in a land parched, lifeless, and without water. I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory. For your love is better than life; my lips shall ever praise you! I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands, calling on your name. ... I think of you upon my bed, I remember you through the watches of the night. You indeed are my savior, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy. My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me.”

- PSALM 63:1-6, 8-9

PRAY TOGETHER

*Actiones Nostra*

Father, may everything we do  
begin with your inspiration

and continue  
with your saving help.

Let our work always find  
its origin in you

and through you reach  
completion.

We ask this  
through Christ our Lord.

AMEN