

A Reflection: Apostolic Constitution Promulgation - Chapter III

The Different Elements in the Liturgy of the Hours

Helen Hawkins April 18, 2021

When I first began reading and praying the Liturgy of the Hours it was a challenge to figure out where to begin so the St. Joseph's Guide has been a real blessing for me.

The Apostolic Constitution Promulgation of the Divine Office found at the beginning of the first volume of the four-volume set has been largely ignored by me. I recognized its importance but being grateful for my little guide, I did not have to worry my way through it.

Over time, however, I find myself wanting to know more about how this prayer was developed and the rationale behind the decisions that were made. I have come to appreciate the organization and thought that was put into the structure of the LOH.

There are twelve elements:

- 1: The Psalms and Christian Prayer
- 2: The Antiphons and Other Aids of Praying the Psalms
- 3: Methods of Singing the Psalms
- 4: The Arrangement of the Psalms in the Office
- 5: The Canticles from the Old and the New Testaments
- 6: The Readings from Sacred Scripture
- 7: The Readings from the Fathers and Church Writers
- 8: The Readings in Honor of Saints
- 9: The Responsories
- 10: The Hymns and Other Non-Biblical Songs
- 11: The Intercessions, the Lord's Prayer and the Concluding Prayer
- 12: Sacred Silence

I want to comment on Sacred Silence because it is an element that I have over-looked. The promulgation does not give precise instructions on how to implement sacred silence. In fact, this section uses words like permissible, prudence and suggest. These words imply that the authors of this promulgation expect that those who pray the LOH have intelligence. In the last paragraph there is the statement "In individual recitation there is greater freedom to pause in meditation on some text that moves the spirit, and the Office does not on this account lose its public character.

Reading through this promulgation, I have come to greater understanding of the public nature of the LOH. It is much more than a beautiful private prayer but is joined with all those who are praying the same prayer at the same time.

The purpose and use of these elements are explained in full in Chapter III. For me, reading Church documents is a bit like reading legal articles and records - which makes sense because that is essentially what they are. I am aware that there are many people who relish these kinds of documents, but I often find them somewhat tedious. However, once I became familiar and learned to love the LOH, this particular document does not affect me in the same way. I am approaching it from a position of simply wanting to learn more about what I have to come to love.

Although a cell phone app can be useful, as a personal preference, I love the physical books of the Liturgy. I love the ribbons, the feel of these books in my hand and I like being reminded that they contain more than the words that magically appear before me in a cell phone app.