

FOREWORD

“The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art.” This bold assertion of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (no. 112) of the Second Vatican Council reminds us that singing, the felicitous combination of melody and words, is in the service of the Lord and integral to the liturgical worship of the Church.

Hymns are human compositions, the voice of the Church responding to the Word of God. They give voice to the Scriptural and poetic threads of liturgical prayer, weaving them into a rich tapestry of praise for God. As such, the hymns are an integral part of the *Liturgy of the Hours*, the liturgical prayer of the Church that consecrates the cycles of days, feasts, and seasons. We can say the primary function of the *Liturgy of the Hours* is the sanctification of time. Lauds, or Morning Prayer, offers praise to God for the gift of a new day. Likewise, Compline, or Night Prayer, is ordered to a preparation for silence, recollection, sleep, and the peace that comes from handing over to God all the affairs of the day that has ended.

This hymnal is meant to be of particular assistance to praying the Divine Office, especially in places where it is celebrated daily or communally. Religious Institutes, seminaries, and parishes will find a powerful resource here to enhance their celebration of the *Liturgy of the Hours*. Even when the Divine Office is prayed privately, that prayer will only be enhanced by the poetry of these hymns. Like the Psalms themselves, which are also musical by nature, the hymns express profound ideas in meter and verse and can move the mind and heart in powerful ways.

It is certainly noteworthy that each Hour of the Divine Office begins with a hymn, and among the various elements that comprise the Hour it is the hymn that often provides the most concise and intense expression of the time or the season, thereby setting the tenor of the prayer that follows. This is emphasized in the *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* (GILH):

“The purpose of the hymn is to provide a setting for the Hour or the feast, and especially in celebrations with a congregation, to form a simple and pleasant introduction to prayer” (no. 42).

Different hymns and prayers are given for each of the Hours so that they may, in keeping with tradition, correspond to the time of day and thus sanctify it in a more appropriate way (no. 80).

[Hymns] generally have an immediate effect in creating the particular quality of the Hour or individual feast, more so than other parts of the Office, and are able to move the mind and heart to devotion, a power frequently enhanced by their beauty of style. In the Office the hymns are the chief poetic element contributed by the Church (no. 173).

In many cases, the hymns of the Divine Office have been part of the liturgical patrimony of the Church for centuries. At the same time, more recent additions to the liturgical calendar have necessitated some newer compositions as well. Still, except for a very few cases, all the hymn texts collected here appeared in the Latin edition of the *Liturgia Horarum* as it was revised following the Second Vatican Council, published first in 1971 and then in a second edition in 1985. This hymnal is therefore the first time the entire corpus of these hymns appears in English.

Organization of This Hymnal

Finding the correct hymn for a given Hour might not be immediately intuitive to the first-time user, but those who are familiar with the organization of the *Liturgy of the Hours* will quickly see the logic of this book. At the top-right corner of the open book there are indications of the liturgical day, season, or occasion and the Hour to which the hymns are assigned. (Note that an indication of Vespers should be understood to refer to both First and Second Vespers for celebrations that have both Hours; it is only when the *Liturgy of the Hours* provides distinct hymns for the two that First and Second Vespers are distinguished.)

Modeled in large part on the *Liber Hymnarius*, the Office hymnal produced by the monks of Solesmes Abbey in France, this volume first presents the hymns for the Proper of Time. The special seasons include hymns for Daytime Prayer and Compline together with the hymns for the other Hours, while in Ordinary Time the hymns for the Minor Hours have been separated into their own sections. Hymns for the Proper of Saints, the Commons, and the Office for the Dead follow, and the main section of the book concludes with the *Te*

Deum. Proper hymns for the celebration of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest are added in an appendix for the benefit of those whose liturgical calendar includes this Feast or for those who might use it in a votive office or some other liturgical celebration.

As a rule, this hymnal provides two versions of each hymn: one set to a metrical tune and another set to a plainsong melody. In a few instances, especially at Daytime Prayer and Compline during Ordinary Time, there are multiple plainsong melodies corresponding to a single metrical tune. In the case of the *Te Deum*, there is only a plainsong melody. For the most part, metrical versions are at the left side of the open book and the plainsong versions are located on the right side, the former assigned odd numbers and the latter assigned even numbers.

Metrical Hymn Tunes

The majority of the hymns in the *Liturgy of the Hours* are written in Long Meter (8 8 8 8), so there is a challenge in avoiding excessive repetition while still finding suitable melodies. The editors have striven to find that balance, but the melody assigned to a hymn is merely a suggestion. Those who pray the Divine Office may choose some other appropriate metrical tune in its place that better suits the custom of that community.

The names given to the various metrical tunes are provided, according to the usual custom. The choice of melodies in this hymnal reflects the logic of the *Liber Hymnarius*. Thus, in some instances, a variety of melodies have been assigned to the same hymn text as that hymn is used throughout the year in different seasons or in liturgical celebrations of differing ranks. On the other hand, many of the melodies are used for multiple hymns, and sometimes the same melody is used repeatedly during a season, or even on a single day. This is a deliberate choice, intended to give a melodic unity to a period of time.

Plainsong Melodies

The plainsong melodies in this hymnal are, for the most part, based on the Gregorian chants of the *Liber Hymnarius*, many of which date back to the first

millennium. Not infrequently, the ancient chant melodies have been slightly adapted (or “eased”) so as to fit the English language better. Those that have been adapted are indicated with an asterisk beneath the hymn and in an index at the end of the book. Even when adapted, however, the meter and pattern of melodic accentuation from the Latin original is preserved.

The plainsong hymns appear in modern notation on a 5-line staff, rather than the square notes (neumes) and 4-line staff used for Gregorian chant. This format is meant to present plainsong in a notation that is accessible to the largest number of people. The melodies are given in a vocal range that reflects typical range for congregational singing. Having this in mind, these melodies may be transposed to suit local circumstances. As a general rule, the natural accentuation of the text itself expresses the rhythmic character of the chant, a cantillation arising from the text.

Using This Hymnal

While the GILH describes the hymns in a broad way (cf. nos. 173–178), it does not address practical matters about their singing. The *Liber Hymnarius*, however, gives some helpful suggestions.

Perhaps with a monastic audience in mind, the Introduction to the *Liber Hymnarius* indicates that the strophes of the hymns can be sung in alternation between cantors and the *chorus*, or between the two halves of the *chorus*, with the possibility that everyone sings the doxology. Naturally, the whole assembly might also sing the entire hymn together. Communities might be interested in trying these different methods of singing the hymns.

The *Liber Hymnarius* also observes that it might be difficult to sing the hymns in the Proper of Saints since they are rarely used over the course of the liturgical year. It therefore proposes that on Memorials it is always permitted to substitute those proper hymns with appropriate choices from the Commons, even though the GILH indicates that whenever a Memorial is observed, any proper hymns assigned to that day are to be used (no. 235b).

The work of preparing the chants and assigning hymn tunes was undertaken by a committee of musicians under the aegis of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). This effort reflects not only an expertise in sacred music, but also a deep understanding of the way the *Liturgy of the Hours* unfolds through the cycles of the year and the celebrations of the Saints.

Almost sixty years ago, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council expressed an earnest desire that the entire Church—clergy, religious, and laity—join in offering praise to God in the Divine Office. The Council encouraged prayer in common whenever possible, and prayer that is carried out with understanding as well as devotion. We hope that this volume will contribute to a renewal in this most beautiful and powerful prayer of the Church.

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