

At Vatican II the Church urged that this ancient tradition of prayer should truly become once more the prayer of the whole Church. In particular it was said that:

Pastors should see to it that the chief hours, vespers particularly, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and the more solemn feasts.

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The intention was to correct a tendency to see such prayer as more or less reserved to the clergy.

Over the past forty years, and especially since the texts have been published in English many other people have begun to pray Morning and Evening Prayer. However the published form of this prayer is sometimes seen as a little complex for those who do not pray the Office together every day.

Recently an adaptation of Evening Prayer has been prepared, firmly based on *The Divine Office* but better suited for parish use, and especially for weekly Sunday celebrations. It has been authorised for use in England and Wales by the Bishops' Conference Department for Christian Life and Worship

The use of this form of prayer provides a very healthy complement to the parish's celebration of the Eucharist, and helps it with the worthy keeping of Sunday, the Lord's Day.

This leaflet is one a series of resources prepared by the Liturgy Office to accompany the publication of *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* and to support parish celebrations of the Prayer of the Church. ©2006 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

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**Liturgy
Office**
ENGLAND
& WALES

Evening Prayer

CELEBRATING
SUNDAY
EVENING
PRAYER

Evening Prayer is part of the ancient tradition of the Church.

Christians have always marked the morning and evening hours of the day with prayer. The earliest sources outside the New Testament tell us that they prayed the 'Our Father' at morning and evening. Other early documents tell us that they blessed the lighting of lamps at the hour of sunset by calling on Christ, the 'joyful light of God the Father'.

Still today, as the light of day dims, the Church gathers for her Evening Prayer, to offer thanksgiving to God for the gift of Christ, the light of the world.

In her prayer the Church also calls to mind her baptismal vocation to die to sin with Christ and live with him in holiness.

The liturgy of Evening Prayer, sometimes known as Vespers, can take a number of different forms. However these are generally slight variants on the following basic form, namely:

Introduction

Psalmody

Word

Prayer

The particular form which is described overleaf is based on that given in *The Divine Office*, the Church's official rite. It has been adapted slightly for use in parishes on Sundays.

Introduction

The congregation stands to sing a hymn chosen to suit the hour and the season of the liturgical year.

It remains standing while it makes the opening responses and for an opening rite.

This opening rite can take two forms. The first employs the symbol of light to remind of Christ, light of the world. The second makes use of the burning of incense as a sign of penitence and an image of our prayer rising to God

Psalmody

The congregation sits to take its part in the praying of these lyrical scriptural texts. Although this section is termed **Psalmody** it also includes other lyrical scriptural texts. In the case of Evening Prayer, a text drawn from the Book of Revelation is used, except in Lent when a canticle is drawn from the first letter of Peter.

The Psalms lie at the heart of Evening Prayer. They link us with the Hebrew tradition of daily worship. From the Gospels we learn that the psalms were constantly on the lips of Christ, in his prayer and his teaching. The Psalms conclude with a Trinitarian doxology (*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit...*) – a prayer which acknowledges how the promises of God to Israel are fulfilled in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

After a brief silence the prayer of the assembly is gathered in a Psalm Prayer which again helps with the Christian interpretation of the psalms.

Word

The congregation remains seated to listen to and pray with a reading from the Scriptures. The reading will be followed by a time for silent reflection.

The proclamation of the Word concludes with the singing of the *Magnificat*. This Canticle of Mary, from Luke's account of the mystery of the Incarnation, is a traditional feature of the Church's Evening Prayer. The congregation stands to take its part in the singing of the Gospel.

Prayer

In **Psalmody** and **Word** the principal emphasis has been on the congregation listening to the Lord speak again to the Church through the living word of Scripture. Now, in this final part of Evening Prayer the Church makes her response, interceding for the Church and for the world, for our abiding needs, and for those of the day.

The Intercessions conclude with the offering of the Lord's Prayer.

Evening Prayer ends with a concluding prayer, and with a blessing.