

## Prayer & Silence

In the liturgy prayer is greater than the spoken texts prayed by the presider and the assembly. Prayer is the shared silent response to a passage of scripture, the graceful lighting of a candle or placing of some incense on an incense burner.

Every liturgy needs moments of silence so that people can reflect on what they have heard and listen to the voice of God speaking to them. Silence helps to give a celebration pace and flow leading from one element to another. Different groups will have different capacities for silence and those leading the prayer need to be sensitive to those who have gathered to pray together.

## Participation Aids

Many parishes already provide leaflets for Sunday Mass or special occasions. The purpose of *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* is to provide a structure that local communities can adapt using material they are familiar with. Rather than provide a people's booklet that would have made choices that would be best made locally this book provides the resources for communities to prepare their own leaflets. Though leaflets will be necessary for people's participation, the preparation group will need to consider how else their participation can be enabled.

## Prayer and Reflection

*Let the favour of the Lord be upon us:  
give success to the work of our hands.*

Psalm 89:17

*He makes us remember his wonders.  
The Lord is compassion and love.*

Psalm 110:4

*If the Lord does not build the house,  
in vain do its builders labour.*

Psalm 126:1

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. Excerpts from *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* and this leaflet © 2006 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Excerpts from *The Psalms, a new translation* © 1963, The Grail, England. *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* is published by Canterbury Press [www.scm-canterbury.co.uk]. Further resources can be found at [www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Hours](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Hours)

**Liturgy  
Office**  
ENGLAND  
& WALES

# CELEBRATING SUNDAY EVENING PRAYER

## A Guide for Preparation Groups

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.

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.*  
*Sacrosanctum Concilium 100*

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. *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* 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.

## Structure

The liturgy of Evening Prayer, sometimes known as Vespers, has the following basic format. There might be slight variations how your community chooses to celebrate Sunday Evening Prayer.

### Introduction

- Hymn
- Opening Responses
- Opening Rite: Light *or*
- Opening Rite: Incense *or*
- Evening Thanksgiving

### Psalmody

- Seasonal Psalm  
*followed by* Psalm Prayer
- Second Psalm  
[optional]
- New Testament Canticle

### Word

- Scripture Reading
- Silence *or*
- Response
- Magnificat

### Prayer

- Intercessions
- Lord's Prayer
- Concluding Prayer & Blessing

## Ministry of Liturgy Preparation

*All ministries are ministries of service, enabling the prayer of the community.* CSEP, page 14

*The main consideration is to ensure that the celebration is not too inflexible or elaborate nor concerned merely with the formal observance of rules, but that it matches the reality of what is being celebrated. The primary aim must be to inspire hearts with a desire for genuine prayer and to show that the celebration of God's praise is a thing of joy.* General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours 279

Before beginning to celebrate Evening Prayer it may be helpful to establish a preparation group. They could be drawn from a parish liturgy committee, another parish group or be newly established. The task of the group will be to prepare the liturgies and help prepare the assembly for celebration.

The group should aim to plan a season at a time. At the next meeting reflect on the liturgies you have previously celebrated before planning the next season.

A central aspect of the liturgies in this book is that through repetition of structure, text and music our participation in the prayer is deepened.

The material is therefore intended to be repeated over a series of weeks so that not only the structure of the prayer will become familiar to people but also the texts themselves. There are suggestions that some texts are changed with the liturgical seasons; other settings, such as the Magnificat, might not be changed for a longer period to allow people to get to know and pray the texts. Though this form of prayer may initially be new to many people in the beginning it is desired that through repetition of common elements it will provide a welcome opportunity for prayer and praise to God. Planners and musicians need to respect this aspect of the prayer rather than be continually seeking after novelty.

It would be ideal to start with one of the liturgical seasons of Advent or Lent when people look to the Church to provide opportunities for communal prayer. The length and themes of the season also give the liturgies a clear framework.