

The Holy Hour

This devotion developed from the custom of keeping vigil with the Blessed Sacrament from the Maundy Thursday Eucharist to the Good Friday liturgy. However, it is also appropriate to honor the Holy Hour at home, particularly when it is not possible to gather in vigil at the church. This can be a time of humble and holy adoration as we meditate on this aspect of our Lord's Passion.

The hour may be spent in any quiet space in your home. Plants, flowers, and other sacred objects may be set out to create a designated sacred space that echoes the garden of Gethsemane. Instructions on how to create sacred space at home are available in the collection of Holy Week resources where this liturgy was found.

The Agony in the Garden

Mark 14:32-42

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake."

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."

He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him.

He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

I. God's Presence: Adoration

God is everywhere. There is no place in heaven or in earth from which God is excluded. From the first moment of my existence to the present moment, I have been in God's presence. Everywhere. At all times. Often I forget this truth. Often I go about my life with no thought of God's nearness. But here, in this place and in these minutes, I will remember that I am in the presence of God.

Psalm 139

*Lord, you have searched me out and known me; *
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.*

*You trace my journeys and my resting-places *
and are acquainted with all my ways.*

*Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, *
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.*

*You press upon me behind and before *
and lay your hand upon me.*

*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; *
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.*

*Where can I go then from your Spirit? *
where can I flee from your presence?*

*If I climb up to heaven, you are there; *
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.*

*If I take the wings of the morning *
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,*

*Even there your hand will lead me *
and your right hand hold me fast.*

*If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, *
and the light around me turn to night,"*

*Darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day; *
darkness and light to you are both alike.*

God longs to be known; creation reflects God's creative generosity. The call of Israel and the prophets' words reveal God's purposes. The dignity of human nature and the imagination that pulls our minds toward eternity and holiness reflect something of God's own being. And still God acts once more to be known.

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we have beheld his glory, the glory as of the Father's only son." The eternal Word takes flesh and the God we cannot see is: an infant in Mary's arms; a young boy standing in the temple; a teacher gathering those who would hear; a healer reaching toward those shunned and in pain; a man walking with his friends into the garden under a full moon.

In the face of Jesus, we see God.

And now, Jesus has completed his work on earth and is in the Father's presence. The Church and its mission of prayer and service continue Jesus' work and stand with him before God. In the sacraments, the grace and healing Jesus offers are still present and active in the world.

***D**ear Jesus, I believe that you are the eternal Word,
that by you all things were made,
you have made me and given me everything.*

*I believe that you love me
and that you know and understand me better than I can know myself.*

*I believe that you are here,
because you love me and would not leave me alone;
because you know my sorrows and failings
and would not leave me in isolation;
to strengthen me so that I can serve you in those around me.*

*I believe that you are here,
so that I can find solace in your presence;
so that I can acknowledge my guilt and find forgiveness;
to help me on the path that leads to eternal joys.*

Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief. Amen.

II. For the Forgiveness of Sins: Penitence

Knowing the presence of God, and standing close to Jesus, I come to know myself more clearly as well. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faces what will come. Just moments before, he interpreted his coming death and offered himself for the healing of the world—“This is my blood, which is shed for the forgiveness of sins.” In some way, the final effect of every sin is the death that Jesus is about to endure. Jesus accepts this burden. And now, I acknowledge that my sins are part of that burden.

I am responsible, in some part, for the agony Jesus suffers.

“As you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me.”

Matthew 25

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

Acts 9

“God made Christ, who knew no sin, to become sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God.”

2 Corinthians 5

Too often I am unwilling or afraid to admit that I have hurt or burdened others; now in the presence of the One who bears all our burdens, I will try to be honest and clear-sighted.

Too often I struggle to justify my own existence, here in the presence of One who knows and loves me, I can find the courage to put aside excuses and explanations.

Now, in the presence of Jesus, I will, as I am able, admit and confess my sins, asking forgiveness and seeking a new and better life.

Now in the presence of Jesus, I can lay down the burden of guilt and shame and find forgiveness for what is past and hope for what is to come.

O Blessed Jesus, in your presence I know the full glory of a human life and the distortions and destruction caused by sin; give me grace to see my sins, things done and things left undone; give me grace to know how my words have been dishonest or hurtful, how my habits have disfigured my soul, and how I have failed in the face of temptations, great and small. Let me confess them honestly and with genuine sorrow that I have added to the burden of the world’s suffering that falls on you.

Using the form that follows, make as honest and complete a confession as you can, trusting in God's mercy.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.

Here pause to name the particular sins and omissions you need to confess...

But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, spare thou those who confess their faults, restore thou those who are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord; and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. *Amen.*

The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 41-42

You promise that there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents;

You insist that you come to call sinners, not the righteous;

You say to the woman weeping at your feet, "Your sins are forgiven you;" and to the thief hanging on the cross next to yours, "This day you will be with me in paradise."

Guilty as I am, you call me here and prepare a place for me at your table and welcome my feeble prayer. And so, I am sorry for all that I have done and left undone. I ask forgiveness and trust your promise that it is mine.

Psalm 51

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; *
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.*

*Wash me through and through from my wickedness *
and cleanse me from my sin.*

*For I know my transgressions, *
and my sin is ever before me.*

*Against you only have I sinned *
and done what is evil in your sight.*

*And so you are justified when you speak *
and upright in your judgment.*

*Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, *
a sinner from my mother's womb.*

*For behold, you look for truth deep within me, *
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.*

*Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; *
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.*

*Make me hear of joy and gladness, *
that the body you have broken may rejoice.*

*Hide your face from my sins *
and blot out all my iniquities.*

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, *
and renew a right spirit within me.*

*Cast me not away from your presence *
and take not your holy Spirit from me.*

The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 656-657

And now, knowing myself in light of your great mercy, I must make one more confession. I come with resentments and grudges against others.

In some, I am responding to real offenses, and in some I am guilty of prejudice, envy, or a lack of charity.

You teach us to pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

Just as I ask your forgiveness, I ask your grace that I may forgive those who have done wrong toward me and that my heart might be emptied of false judgments and petty resentments.

So now, I name those I need to forgive and those toward whom my heart must change.

"Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

Colossians 3

III. Intercessions

I watch Jesus in agony in the garden, aware that though he prays alone, he is sharing the sufferings of an untold multitude. Fear and uncertainty in the face of the future, suffering inflicted by others, false judgments, abandonment, the last, slow breaths before death—in his passion, Jesus reaches into the real experience of countless mortals.

As he is willing to share our humanity, so he asks us to bear one another's burdens. And so, in these moments, I will hold in mind the needs of the world and of those closest to me.

In some small but real way, my prayer joins with Jesus as he bears the world's sufferings in his heart before the Father.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather your children together."

Luke 13

"Weep not for me, but for yourselves and your children."

Luke 23

Holding each person or situation before God, asking that God's will be done, I trust that in ways I cannot trace or see, God's Spirit can work healing and restoration. Trusting that God's will is for peace and well-being, I pray ...

For an end to violence between peoples and nations,

And an end to oppression and injustice;

For a right use of the riches of creation and an end to poverty and hunger;

For this nation, its people and leaders;

For the Church throughout the world, its unity, witness, and service;

For my own parish, and those who encourage me in faith, service, and prayer;

For those who are ill, those who grieve, those troubled in mind or spirit.

For the particular needs of those closest to me that I name now...

For the departed, remembering those dear to me, and those for whom no one prays.

IV. For Myself, Petition

Jesus has taught and healed, traveling through the villages and cities, always accompanied by disciples and followers. Even now, when in the last moments before his arrest and death, he has gathered at the table with his friends, and he takes those closest to him with him into the garden. Now he invites me to come and be with him and he is ready to hear my prayers.

“Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.”

Matthew 11

First I ask for my spiritual needs

For light and grace to know and do what is good;

For faith to believe and to trust in God;

To grow in love and to be strong in service;

To develop virtues and to know the fruits of the Spirit;

To continue in the Christian faith and life, and finally to die a good and holy death.

I also bring the needs of my daily life—yearnings and hopes, frustrations and fears—not because he does not know them, but because he asks me to come honestly and openly to him. Even the petty and the silly can be spoken here, they must be spoken here; to hide them or pretend would cut me off from Jesus. The deepest longings of my heart can only be known when I am willing to honestly face all my longings. These requests and needs I bring, knowing that in the end, all prayers lead to Jesus’ great act of renunciation—“nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” So, here I name my needs and admit my desires, asking that God will shape my desires toward what is good and holy and life-giving.

Thanks be to thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, for all the pains and insults which thou hast borne for me; for all the many blessings thou hast won for me. O Holy Jesus, most merciful redeemer, friend, and brother, may I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day.

Richard of Chichester, 1253

V. Closing Devotions, Resolution

My watch with Jesus comes to a close. I have spent this time with him in the work of adoration, penitence, intercession, and petition. Now I must go back into my daily life. The world into which I go will be the same as when I came here an hour ago. I shall have the same problems to face, the same circumstances in which to live. But I, who live in these circumstances and face these problems, am not the same. For I have been here with Jesus; I have opened my heart to him.

I have placed my problems at his feet in the garden; I am taking out into the world a new strength, a new power. Jesus goes out into the world with me, in my heart.

And before I go, I stop and consider.

How will my life be different after spending this time with Jesus?

How will I act differently toward others?

What blessings and gifts will I recognize and accept with thanksgiving?

What sins and habits will I lay aside?

Before I leave, I will make one or two particular resolutions about my life in the days ahead.

“I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you offer yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

Romans 12

“Come, follow me.”

John 1

Jesus, I turn to you as Savior, I trust your grace and love, I promise to follow and obey you as Lord. Without you, I am nothing. Indeed without you, nothing exists. In your grace, I am called to know and follow you here and to live in your presence through eternity. Here, I bow before you in gratitude and awe. I am but a handful of dust, and you have made of me a child of God.

I adore you, the eternal Word of the Father, the source of life and Light from Light. You are wisdom and peace, truth, and light—and in you, humanity finds hope and peace.

Open my eyes to all the ways you come toward me in grace. Strengthen my feet to follow where you lead and my hands to serve as you served.

As you stand before the Father, pray for me and teach me to pray

Our Father...

And now, I leave with one final prayer.

When I must face my last agony and enter death, when I stand before your judgment, when I finally see you as you really are, all the glories of your Godhead and the perfection of your humanity revealed in light, I beg you to remember then, O Jesus, that I knelt here in adoration of you; that I waited with you in your agony, and although I could not see you with my outward eyes, still I did not deny your presence here. And in that dreaded hour of my agony and death, dear Jesus, remembering all this, take me to yourself, forever and ever. *Amen.*

*Savior, again
to thy dear Name we raise
with one accord
our parting hymn of praise;
we stand to bless thee
ere our worship cease;
then, lowly kneeling,
wait thy word of peace.*

*Grant us thy peace
upon our homeward way;
with thee began,
with thee shall end the day:
guard thou the lips from sin,
the hearts from shame,
that in this house
have called upon thy Name.*

*Grant us thy peace, Lord,
through the coming night;
turn thou for us
its darkness into light;
from harm and danger
keep thy children free,
for dark and light
are both alike to thee.*

*Grant us thy peace
throughout our earthly life;
peace to thy church
from error and from strife;
peace to our land,
the fruit of truth and love;
peace in each heart,
thy Spirit from above.*

*Thy peace in life,
the balm of every pain;
thy peace in death,
the hope to rise again;
then, when thy voice
shall bid our conflict cease,
call us, O Lord,
to thine eternal peace.*

John Ellerton (1826-1893)

To the most holy and undivided Trinity;
To the crucified and risen humanity
of Jesus Christ our Lord,
with the ever-blessed Virgin Mary
and all the saints;
be praise, honor, and glory from every creature.
And unto us the remission of all sins
and the hope of glory throughout all ages,
world without end. *Amen.*