



Job  
FOR  
Retired  
Laymen

By  
George A. Blair

**Copyright © 2007**  
**By**  
**George A. Blair**

## Preface



uring the eight wonderful years I spent in a Religious order, I remember that in the list of assignments given to each person, those who were retired or infirm had “Orat pro Soc.” after them: Their task was to pray for the Society. Upon my recent retirement from work, the thought occurred to me that I now had a new job: to pray, because the world I live in so desperately needs prayer.

And so I bought a breviary and began to recite the hours the way monks and priests do. The trouble was that the English of the translations is so ghastly, and the hymns are such—let’s face it, doggerel—when the lyrics are simply recited, that I could not stand it. The heart-felt poetry of the psalms, to me, was ruined by the attempts to use antiquated expressions like “O kings,” and “all things” and “I feared lest” and so on, and the cutesy inversions like “To you from the depths I call.”

So in desperation I decided that I had to rewrite the text, so that I wouldn’t spend my hours of prayer complaining to God about the way I was being forced to listen to him. Unfortunately, my knowledge of Hebrew at the moment extends barely beyond the alphabet, and so I had to translate from the English, so to speak, using several versions for comparison. But after all, the Douay Bible for centuries was used as a translation from the Latin, not the originals, and we’re dealing with poetry here; and you really can’t translate a poem into another language without some reworking of the original to adapt it to the genius of the new language.

At any rate, I find that I can read the text now and get at its meaning without fighting, and so it’s easier to pray this way. And because others might also find something like this useful and an aid to prayer, I offer it for whatever it’s worth.

## PREFACE

The *Liturgy of the Hours*, I also discovered to my surprise, did not include all the psalms (it left out four or five of them) in its four-week psalter, and also left out parts of them that were, shall we say, gross, such as the wish of the psalmist that someone would take the Babylonian children and smash them against a rock. I can see why this was done. It *does* seem a bit incongruous, to say the least, for monks to chant such things in choir, even if it is the word of God. But for private devotion, I decided to include the omitted parts, because it is God's inspired text, after all, and so must have something to offer us.

I also decided to arrange the psalms into a two-week cycle instead of four weeks, giving three to precede each reading in Matins, and two for each of the daytime hours. To me, this makes reading them somewhat more satisfying.

Since I hate flipping pages and looking up from the text to recite memorized things (like the Lord's Prayer and the *Gloria Patri*), I decided to write them in. There's still some flipping, since the readings vary from day to day.

I want to ask your pardon for my translation of some familiar things. I refer to "Christ" as "Prince," because that is basically what the title meant, and we miss this, because "Christ" now sounds merely as if it were Jesus's last name, which it isn't. I also put the Lord's prayer, the *Hail Mary*, the *Hail Holy Queen*, and the *Gloria Patri* into contemporary English, because everything else was put into it, and I wanted to be consistent. If it makes you feel more comfortable to recite the version you know instead of what's printed here, go right ahead. Just ignore what annoys you; if you're using this book, it's for *your* prayer, not mine. I'm just sharing what works for me.

A couple of other things. That four-letter set of consonants that crops up everywhere, YHWH, is a transliteration of the Divine Name YaHWeH or JeHoVaH ("I AM" is the translation), for which the Hebrews substituted "Master," the word a slave uses addressing his owner, because they never pronounced the name at all, to avoid using it frivolously. I have left the name in the actual psalms, on the grounds that someone who is reciting them, particularly to himself in the context of prayer, is being anything but frivolous, and the psalmist himself was divinely inspired to write the name. However, I use

## PREFACE

“Master” in other places, to reinforce the notion that we are in fact God’s slaves. True, Jesus called us “friends” and not “slaves,” but in that same discourse in the Last Supper, he said shortly before, “You call me Teacher and Master, and you are right; that is what I am.” If I were to befriend a cockroach, I might call it my friend, but the fact would still remain that I am a human being, and it is a cockroach; and the distance between YHWH and me is infinitely greater than that. If *he* wants to condescend, it is still not *our* place to presume upon it.

I kept a few traditional things, however, like the old names for the hours: Matins, Lauds, etc., as well as for the New Testament songs (the *Benedictus*, *Magnificat*, and *Nunc Dimittis*) as well as the *Te Deum*, because they’re titles (actually, of course, they’re the first words of the Latin of the song in question), and their translations, or substitutes for them, it seems to me, sound like a cracked bell (“Office of readings,” “Midmorning prayer” “Song of Zechariah” etc.)

Anyway, here’s the way you use the book: The main part of it is the psalms (the psalter). You read the psalms for each day; the prayers and readings that go with them are in that section, except in Matins, where after the first three of the set, you flip to the first (Scripture) reading in the Proper of the Seasons (you’re told to do this in the Psalter), based on what week of the liturgical year it is. You can find out what week it is by consulting your parish bulletin; it’s the same as the week of the Sunday Mass. After reading that reading, you flip back to the psalter and read the second set of three psalms and then flip to the second (non-Scripture) reading from the Proper of the Seasons; there is a prayer at the end of this reading. If the day happens to be a saint’s feast (or some other feast that goes by the regular date of the year), then at the end of the second reading you just did (and its prayer), you flip to the Proper of the Saints and add the reading for that date as a third one (along with its prayer). On Sundays you end Matins with the *Te Deum*, which is back in the psalter again (on daily feasts on which the *Te Deum* is said, it is written in after the added reading).

This is a pretty drastic simplification of the actual Liturgy of the Hours, especially on larger feast days, but I think it achieves the purpose, and the fancy stuff can be left to the monks. I also simplified the Sunday liturgy a bit; instead of having the antiphons for the

## PREFACE

Magnificat and the Benedictus and the prayers at each of the hours from the Proper, I chose antiphons and prayers from Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, Trinity, and Christ the King for the different hours; the prayer at Matins will be from the Proper, as it always is. Again, it saves flipping pages.

I substituted sonnets for the hymns, as being something more conducive to private, reflective reading. Since I could not find sonnets I liked already written, I wrote my own. You will, I am afraid, have to either bear with them, or, if you don't like them, you can always substitute some hymn you know.

The idea of doing all of this is that you make reading the liturgy of the hours your new job, now that you don't have one you get paid for any more. This has a dual purpose: it performs a service for the Church and the world which is sorely needed, and it tends to give a sense of purpose and meaning to your life now, which makes it worth while to get up in the morning. There's nothing more debilitating and "old-making" than thinking that your life is now useless. And it isn't. This is a task that *needs* to be done; but it doesn't require muscles; the only thing it needs is time. You might find it rather a chore at the beginning, but that's all right; work is work, after all. But if my experience is any indication, as you get practiced at it, you will find yourself looking forward to listening to what the Master has to say to you today, both through his inspired words, and through the musings on them of important figures throughout the history of the Church.

If you don't think you have time for this sort of thing, remember that no one ever *has* time for anything; you always *make* time for what you care about. But if it's a choice in your mind between doing this and going to daily Mass, by all means go to Mass. Actually, do both; it won't kill you. You might even work in a Rosary as you get into the swing of things.

I wouldn't, however, make a fetish of reading the hours at the time that's indicated by them (Matins when you wake up, Lauds to begin the day, Terce —the third hour—in the middle of the morning, Sext at noon, None in the middle of the afternoon, Vespers at sunset, and Compline at bedtime); after all, we *do* have things to do, which can take up large chunks of our time, even in retirement. But still, it would be a good thing to punctuate your day with these readings, more or

less; but you can be flexible. The basic “duty,” if you want to call it that, is to get through all the readings for the day in that day. Don’t sweat it if you don’t make it; but that’s what you should shoot for. God is a God of peace, not stress. And even though it helps to think of it as a job (something you “have” to do), it’s really something that’s an act of generosity, and free; nobody, least of all God, is going to be mad at you if you miss—it’s just better not to. Remember, in heaven you’ll be praying all the time, but you’ll be having fun doing it forever. There’s no reason you can’t begin while you’re still here.

Рекламе



## Preface