

The image of an hour with Jesus has been part of Catholic Tradition since the very beginning. Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, mournfully asked His disciples, "Could you not watch with me one hour?" (Matthew 26:40).

A Holy Hour gives us the opportunity to honor Our Lord's request and place ourselves before Him. We join our own prayers, works, joys, and sufferings with His and "by the mercies of God, present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

## How May We Celebrate a Holy Hour?

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There are many ways to celebrate a Holy Hour. All that is required is to make ourselves as present as we can be to God.

For instance, we may choose to focus on the offertory we celebrate at each Mass. We know that, in addition to the bread and wine that is offered to God on the paten and in that chalice, we also offer ourselves.

When we make that offering, our Eucharistic Lord does with us what He does with the Eucharist:

*Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."*

— Matthew 26:26

In the same way, Jesus takes our lives, our gifts, our talents, even our weaknesses, all of which we bring to Him during our Holy Hour. He gives thanks to His Father, breaks us, and offers us as food for the world. This "breaking" comes in the form of refining, purging, challenging, and "growing" us into the people He calls us to become. During our Holy Hour, we can become aware of this refining, this formation, of which Isaiah spoke:

*"I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations."*

— Isaiah 42:6

At its most basic, however, a Holy Hour can be summed up in a simple story: A visitor to a Catholic parish noticed an old man just sitting in the back of the parish with his eyes on the tabernacle. After some time, curiosity got the better of the visitor and he asked the old man, "What are you doing?"

The man replied, "I look at Him, and He looks at me."

A perfectly good Holy Hour can be made simply by sitting in the presence of God. Place yourself in front of the tabernacle or monstrance, and just *be* (cf. Psalm 46:10). Quietly allow the silence: just you and Jesus, sitting in each other's presence. Some Catholics have jokingly described this simple exercise as "spiritual radiation therapy," because being in the presence of Christ, with a heart open to His love, can change and heal you.

You may find, for instance, that simply trying to be silent is much



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harder than it may initially seem. A great many voices inside us try to fill the silence. Talk to Jesus about them. Are they voices that need to be listened to, or voices that need to hush for now while you listen to Jesus? As this process goes on, you will discover the truth of something Pope John Paul II pointed out: Jesus doesn't simply reveal the Father to us. He reveals us to ourselves.

As you continue this form of Holy Hour, continue to hand over to Jesus all the chatter inside you, while asking Him to make clear to you some simple, practical ways you can obey Him on that particular day. Offer that act of obedience to Him and ask Him to bless and guide it. If necessary, jot it down so you don't forget it. When your Hour is up, go and act on His word.

## Holy Hour and *Lectio Divina*

Another way to make a Holy Hour is to set it aside for meditation on Scripture. One popular way is through *Lectio Divina*.

*Lectio Divina* consists of four parts that may be compared to stages of growth and harvest:

- *Lectio* (Reading)
- *Meditatio* (Meditating on the Scripture)
- *Oratio* (Conversing with God about the Scripture)
- *Contemplatio* (Contemplating God himself in light of Scripture)

In the *Lectio* portion, you toil in the "vineyard," growing and harvesting the "grapes" by

reading a portion of the Word of God (the day's Mass readings, for instance), paying special attention to each word and looking for the connections between passages you are reading. If you read the Mass readings, the connections are fairly easy to find, since the readings are usually the first reading and the Gospel, generally chosen because they relate to one another in some way.

In *Meditatio*, you work at squeezing "grapes" for all the "juice" you can wring from them. One way to begin meditating on the Scripture is simply to begin committing the memory, repeating just a few words of a passage over and over, until you can recite it perfectly. In so doing, you will tend to notice the words and their connections, their connotations, their deeper meanings.

In *Oratio*, you ponder God's word in your heart, as Mary did, and talk the Scripture over with God. In so doing, you "ferment the juice" and let it age into "fine wine." You ask God questions, wrestle with the text, and try to discover the depths of meaning He put there. For example, you may ponder why Jesus would use spit to heal a blind man when He could have just spoken and achieved the same

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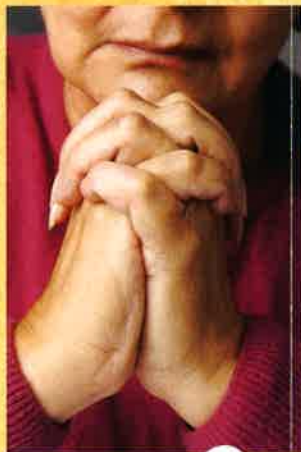
result; why He called the Canaanite woman a “dog,” but then commended her faith and answered her prayer; what the image of, say, a shepherd or a vine means; or, why the psalmist would say the Lord God is a sun *and* shield (two things that would not normally be connected, and that don’t seem especially connected to the rest of the images in Psalm 84). Talk to God about all of this. Expect Him to give you insight into both the Scripture and its application to your life. Although this insight may not come during your Holy Hour, the Lord will answer you — just remember to be open to His answer.

Finally, there is *Contemplatio*: the fruit of your labors with the “grapes” now yields “wine.” As God reveals himself to us through the Scriptures, we begin to see that the truth of God is not merely a collection of facts, but the gift of a Lover to His beloved. We are moved to both gratitude and obedience; indeed, we discover that our gratitude is meaningless without obedience.

## Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication

Another way to approach a Holy Hour is through prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication (ACTS).

**Adoration and confession:** We tend to think of “prayer” as “asking for stuff.” To be sure, God hears our requests and grants or refuses them according to His will. But Jesus, in teaching us to pray, does not put our request for our daily bread first; instead, He guides us in confessing, acknowledging who God is in our lives, and adoring Him who loves us so much and gives of His very self to us:



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*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

This acknowledgment teaches us:

- We are not in control (thanks be to God!)
- God has things under control
- Praising, adoring God makes us stronger and wiser

**Thanksgiving and supplication:** In acknowledging our lack of control, we also acknowledge that God knows our needs better than we ourselves do, and that He cares for us and provides for us as our loving Father. We give Him thanks for His goodness and make our requests known to Him in prayer, while simultaneously surrendering to His will for us. In the very act of praying, uttering our words of supplication to God, He is present in us, giving us His grace, and guiding us to accept His response to our requests.

## An Opportunity of Grace

The Holy Hour is given us by the Church not as a law or a set of rules to keep, but as an opportunity for an open encounter with the living God. The suggestions given here for making a Holy Hour are just that — suggestions. There are many other ways to celebrate a Holy Hour: praying a Rosary, praying a Litany of the Divine Praises, devoting specific periods of prayer to particular needs or particular people, taking time for “holy study” and simply finding a good spiritual writer to read, using the time before celebrating the Sacrament of Penance to do an examination of conscience, or singing hymns. There are, of course, countless other ways to meet with God. What matters is that your encounter with Him be sincere and prayerful, with a genuine openness to let God just look at you (all of you) as you look at Him, allowing the distance between you to diminish.

## For More Information

Holy Hour Prayers:

<http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/prayerseucharist.shtml>

Holy Hour for Vocations:

<http://www.religiouslife.com/harvestprayer.html>

Holy Hour for Life:

<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/liturgy/HolyHourBlSac.pdf>

Holy Hour for Peace:

<http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/holyhourpeace.shtml>

Holy Hour of Reparation:

<http://www.catholictradition.org/Two-Hearts/holy-hour.htm>

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# How to Make a Holy Hour



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“Could you not watch with me one hour?”  
(Matthew 26:40)