

## **St Basil the Great, *Longer Rules*, 37**

Moreover, because some use prayer and psalmody as an excuse for neglecting their work, it is necessary to bear in mind that for certain other tasks a particular time is allotted, according to the words of Ecclesiastes (3:1): 'All things have their season.' For prayer and psalmody, however, as also, indeed, for some other duties, every hour is suitable, that, while our hands are busy at their tasks, we may praise God sometimes with the tongue (when this is possible or, rather, when it is conducive to edification); or, if not, with the heart, at least, in psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles, as it is written (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16).

Thus, in the midst of our work can we fulfil the duty of prayer, giving thanks to Him who has granted strength to our hands for performing our tasks and cleverness to our minds for acquiring knowledge, and for having provided the materials, both that which is in the instruments we use and that which forms the matter of the arts in which we may be engaged, praying that the work of our hands may be directed toward its goal, the good pleasure of God.

Thus we acquire a recollected spirit—when in every action we beg from God the success of our labours and satisfy our debt of gratitude to Him who gave us the power to do the work, and when, as has been said, we keep before our minds the aim of pleasing Him. If this is not the case, how can there be consistency in the words of the Apostle bidding us to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17), with those others, 'we worked night and day' (2 Thessalonians 3:8)?

Nor, indeed, because thanksgiving at all times has been enjoined even by law and has been proved necessary to our life from both reason and nature, should we therefore be negligent in observing those times for prayer customarily established in communities—times which we have inevitably selected because each period contains a reminder peculiar to itself of blessings received from God.

Prayers are recited early in the morning so that the first movements of the soul and the mind may be consecrated to God and that we may take up no other consideration before we have been cheered and heartened by the thought of God, as it is written: 'I remembered God and was delighted' (Psalm 76:3), and that the body may not busy itself with tasks before we have fulfilled the words: 'To thee will I pray, O Lord; in the morning thou shalt hear my voice. In the morning I will stand before thee and will see' (Psalm 5:4-5).

Again at the third hour the brethren must assemble and betake themselves to prayer, even if they may have dispersed to their various employments. Recalling to mind the gift of the Spirit bestowed upon the Apostles at this third hour (Acts 2:15), all should worship together, so that they also may become worthy to receive the gift of sanctity, and they should implore the guidance of the Holy Spirit and His instruction in what is good and useful, according to the words: 'Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within my bowels. Cast me not away from thy face; and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and strengthen me with a guiding spirit' (Psalm 50:10-12). Again, it is said elsewhere, 'Thy

good spirit shall lead me into the right land' (Psalm 142:10); and having prayed thus, we should again apply ourselves to our tasks.

But, if some, perhaps, are not in attendance because the nature or place of their work keeps them at too great a distance, they are strictly obliged to carry out wherever they are, with promptitude, all that is prescribed for common observance, for 'where there are two or three gathered together in my name,' says the Lord, 'there am I in the midst of them' (Matthew 18:20).

It is also our judgment that prayer is necessary at the sixth hour, in imitation of the saints who say: 'Evening and morning and at noon I will speak and declare; and he shall hear my voice' (Psalm 54:17). And so that we may be saved from invasion and the noonday Devil (Psalm 90:6), at this time, also, the ninetieth Psalm will be recited.

The ninth hour, however, was appointed as a compulsory time for prayer by the Apostles themselves in the Acts where it is related that 'Peter and John went up to the temple at the ninth hour of prayer' (Acts 3:1).

When the day's work is ended, thanksgiving should be offered for what has been granted us or for what we have done rightly therein and confession made of our omissions whether voluntary or involuntary, or of a secret fault, if we chance to have committed any in words or deeds, or in the heart itself; for by prayer we propitiate God for all our misdemeanours. The examination of our past actions is a great help toward not falling into like faults again; wherefore the

Psalmist says: 'the things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them upon your beds' (Psalm 4:5).

Again, at nightfall, we must ask that our rest be sinless and untroubled by dreams. At this hour, also, the ninetieth Psalm should be recited.

Paul and Silas, furthermore, have handed down to us the practice of compulsory prayer at midnight, as the history of the Acts declares: 'And at midnight Paul and Silas praised God' (Acts 16:25). The Psalmist also says: 'I rose at midnight to give praise to thee for the judgments of thy justifications' (Psalm 118:62).

Then, too, we must anticipate the dawn by prayer, so that the day may not find us in slumber and in bed, according to the words: "My eyes have prevented the morning; that I might meditate on thy words' (Psalm 118:148).

None of these hours for prayer should be unobserved by those who have chosen a life devoted to the glory of God and His Christ.

Moreover, I think that variety and diversity in the prayers and psalms recited at appointed hours are desirable for the reason that routine and boredom, somehow, often cause distraction in the soul, while by change and variety in the psalmody and prayers said at the stated hours it is refreshed in devotion and renewed in sobriety.