

Using the *Brotherhood Prayer Book*

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INTRODUCTION

Prayer does not come naturally. Why should it? Since we are born “full of evil lust and inclinations...and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God,”¹ it is no wonder that we should not naturally know how to pray. This is why Jesus' own disciples asked Him to teach them to pray.² When one flips through the *Brotherhood Prayer Book (BPB)*, it is easy (though a mistake) to conclude that the thing is simply just too complicated. Hours and offices, versicles and responsories, lection tones and psalm tones, litanies and collects, ordinaries and propers, commons and saints days—it's all enough to be a bit bewildering. It will surely take a person awhile to learn to use this book! In fact, one might easily ask why it isn't easier just to pray and say my own words and not worry about all that medieval sounding stuff. But a closer look and little effort will teach us that if the *BPB* has something of a learning curve, perhaps that is because prayer itself does not come naturally.

We may think *our* words are prayers that are good enough, but so often they fall short. I know from my own experience that when I try to pray just “off the cuff” that I generally wander around, don't get to the point, leave people and concerns out, and generally get weary quite quickly of my own vain babblings. Praying using the Daily Office adds a dimension of discipline and order to our prayers. It fills our ears with God's Word and puts that Word back upon our lips as prayer. Just as the Lord's Prayer is first God's Word and promises, then it is petitions prayed to the Father, so the prayers, readings and liturgy of the Daily Office in the *BPB* means we are wholly (and holy!) saturated with the Lord's Word.

While that all sounds good, the *BPB* can still seem like a daunting piece of work. In some senses it is and it should be. The *BPB* contains the best of daily prayer tradition that has been formed and fashioned from God's Word by the holy catholic church not merely since the Reformation, or even the middle ages, or even the time of Christ and the Apostles, but to the very foundations of the prayer life of the people of God in the Old Testament! The purpose of this paper is a practical one: to give some introduction on *how* to best use the *BPB* in your own life of daily prayer. The Catechism reminds us that we should pray because “God has commanded us [to do so] and has promised to hear us.”³ We will advance from the simple to the complex and see what resources are available in the *BPB* for all “levels” of our discipline and practice in prayer. At its simplest, the *BPB* is a guide for reading the praying the Psalms and reading the Scriptures regularly. At its grandest, it is a breviary suitable for fully observing all (eight!) of the Daily Offices with music. Many other works have undertaken to give the history of daily prayer and the development of the Divine Office and many other fine prayer books and breviaries have been written. The goal here is not to delve into those subjects, but rather give practical advice on using the *BPB* which is a truly evangelical and catholic addition to the church's daily prayer.

IN HIS LAW DOTH HE MEDITATE DAY AND NIGHT

The core of the Daily Office is the praying of the Psalter and the reading of God's Word.

¹AC 29.1

²Luke 11:1

³SC: Lord's Prayer, Conclusion.

The Psalms form the core of each daily office and the Scriptures are read at each office. Here then is the simplest way of using the *BPB*: As a guide to reading and praying the Psalms and reading and hearing the Holy Scriptures. A very simple use of the book would be to select the 31 day Psalter on page 62 and to use the Daily Lectionary on page 63. In the morning, read the selected psalms followed by the New Testament reading from the Lectionary. Then in the evening, do likewise, this time reading the Old Testament Lesson. The reading of the Psalms and the Scriptures is the perfect addition to the simple form of Morning and Evening Prayer given in the Small Catechism. (One could also read fewer psalms per day, perhaps one a day or two a day; pastors, however, are encouraged to pray all of the psalms regularly).

One could later expand the use of the Psalms in the way described on page 61, praying the appointed psalms at various parts of the day. Pray the morning and evening psalms before work or before bed and pray the midday psalm at lunchtime. In every case, all the psalms are conveniently located in the *BPB*. As for the Scriptures, a simple, small pocket Bible is easily carried along with the prayer book. (The advantage of reading the psalms out of the *BPB* is the addition of Psalm prayers at the end of each psalm, which are a great way to collect the thoughts of the Psalm and pray the words of the Psalm back to the Lord). Thus, in a simple and easy way, you have begun a regular and disciplined reading, hearing and praying of God's Word!

I WILL SING UNTO THE LORD A NEW SONG

The *BPB* has many other parts which, aside from the Daily Office, are useful resources for daily prayer. Music sends the devil fleeing and the *BPB* is chock full of great hymns. Many will not be familiar because they are mostly 6th century or earlier and are not seen in most modern hymnals. The collection of hymns is a treasure in itself with texts that are highly penitential, sacramental, seasonal and doxological. The vast majority of the hymns are in the Long Meter which makes them easily singable to a multitude of tunes.⁴ As the length and frequency of your prayer increase, adding hymns to the Psalms and Scripture adds more paint to the portrait that is your prayer. Thus, practically speaking, the *BPB* has now become a hymnal supplement as well as a complete Psalter. This combination, from personal experience, is one of the great features lacking from all prayer books. For example, in the Roman Catholic *Liturgy of the Hours*, there are a good many hymn stanzas scattered throughout, but the Psalter is really chopped up and edited so as to become virtually useless as a whole. In the pan-Lutheran and ecumenical *For All The Saints*, the impressive feature of the complete text of the Scripture Readings was mitigated by no consistent collection of hymnody in the books. In the *BPB* you have psalms and hymns. So, without being overly cumbersome or complicated, you have simple resources for your prayer life. The hymns are collected in the Propers for the Week, (daily hymns), for the Season (hymns for particular Sundays, Seasons, and Feast Days) and for other Saints' days, commemorations and Commons (hymns for particular observances such as the Annunciation or the commemoration of a Doctor of the Church). Simply select one of the hymns and sing it to a familiar tune as an addition to your reading of Psalms and other Scripture.

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

Before we even begin with the Offices themselves, there are yet many more resources which can be used independently or in conjunction with one another. Probably the most important of these would be the Collects for All Occasions beginning on page 402. In addition to whatever other prayers you say, this collection of prayers provides ready words for nearly every conceivable situation: for the Church, for the Ministers of the Word, in times of Drought,

⁴Indices of the hymns in the *BPB*, by first line, meter, etc., are available on the publisher's website:
<http://www.lpb.us/Resources%20for%20Prayer%20Book.htm>

Sickness, prayers for various graces in life, and so on. These collects, sharpened and honed over the centuries of the prayer life of the Church express in powerful, succinct and clear words the desires of our hearts we so often struggle to express. Pray one or more of these collects along with whatever other prayers you offer up to the Lord.

To keep in tune with the Church Year, it is beneficial to pray the Collect for the Week each day. Since the propers for the Church Year are included (beginning on page 296) it is easy to add this prayer also to our devotions.⁵ (Here of course, we begin to see that it is impossible that all of these prayers should be in one place, and so the use of “post-it” tabs, ribbons or bookmarks is helpful. I have found, in practice, that knowing where a particular prayer or section is becomes second nature, like finding one's way around a hymnal or the Scriptures with much use. Indeed, much of the Offices is memorized after a week or two of use). If you like, you can add a “themed” prayer for every day of the week⁶ by praying the daily Collect included in the Weekday Propers for Midday Prayer (p. 264) by day. For example: “Monday: Midday Prayer, p.270-271, a prayer for the Church.” These prayers keep us certain that we are leaving no one out in our prayers so that we might remember St. Paul's words that “supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men.”⁷ So now the *BPB* has grown in your daily use from Psalter to Hymnal to Prayer Book. It is all of these and, as is always the case with the Lord's gifts, there is always more!

Some other items that will be of great benefit in our devotional lives include the Seven Penitential Psalms and the Great Litany. A devotional exercise in itself, it is entirely suitable for times of intense penitence and reflection. There is also included the Litany of the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, a fine devotional exercise for use before receiving the Lord's body and blood. The Itinerarium (Prayer Before Travel) reminds us to commit our ways unto the Lord and there is no time of our lives where we should not call upon God's protection and blessing of safety. In addition to the regular Psalm schedules, there is an index of Psalms appropriate for life's various situations. The Psalter has long been used by God's people as the expression of their own hopes and fears and words with which to call upon their heavenly Father. Finally, rounding out the volume is the Preparation for Private Absolution. With practical instructions for preparing for Private Confession and the “Confession Mirror” (questions for self-reflection based upon the Commandments and their meanings), this section of the *BPB* is yet one more aid to a genuinely evangelical, catechetical, and confessional piety.

EVENING AND MORNING AND AT NOON I WILL PRAY

The *BPB* is designed mainly for use as a four Office breviary. Morning Prayer (Lauds) is prayed in the morning (when you awaken), Midday Prayer is prayed anywhere throughout the day (morning, noon, afternoon). Evening Prayer (Vespers) around Supper time and Compline before bed. My recommendation, if you would like to begin the Offices themselves, is to pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer daily. With the Scripture Readings, these Offices can take between thirty minutes and an hour to pray. It is, in some senses, like setting aside time to exercise. One must “just do it.” I have found also, that Midday Prayer and Compline both require less than a half hour to pray. Does two and half to three hours a day sound like too much time? We recall Dr. Luther's advice: “It would be fine if every morning, noon, and evening [pastors] would read...at least a page or two from the Catechism, the Prayer Book, the New Testament, or something else from the Bible and would pray the Lord's Prayer for themselves and their

⁵The Church Year followed is the Historic One-Year Series.

⁶Excluding Sunday.

⁷1 Tim. 2:1.

parishioners.”⁸ He also notes in his *Simple Way to Pray*, that “It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, 'Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.' Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day.”⁹

If you are unused to liturgical daily prayer, another approach would be to begin praying Compline each night before bed. Compline is a fixed office. It is the same each day and does not vary according to the season. It is a fine introduction to liturgical daily prayer since it includes two Scripture readings and three psalms in addition to the other material that makes up the Office. When you are comfortable with the structure of the Office, then perhaps add Morning Prayer and then Evening Prayer as you build “prayer stamina.” As you have time and inclination, you can add the Midday Office. After awhile, four Offices become a regular and routine part of your day. You might also try, on certain days or seasons (for example, in Lent or Holy Week) to pray even more than the four Offices. A full cycle of Offices might also be something worth attempting at a Retreat or other gathering. I am sure that Eight Offices would be a near impossible task for most people! But the *BPB* certainly can “handle” such a cycle of prayer if one desires it, even for a limited time or occasion.

We might note that to pray the Daily Office must stem from God's command and promise to hear our prayer. Whenever even one Office should become an “obligation” or “necessary” then we have lost the Gospel way and ended back up in the “babbling hours” that Luther himself criticized in the *Large Catechism*. The goal is to meditate upon God's Word and speak it back to Him, having His promises fill our ears and be upon our lips. This is why a breviary is so helpful, too. It protects us from vain babblings by giving us the simple words of Scripture and organizing them in a way that carries us throughout our day, the year and our lives, anchored in the Word of God. The joy of the *BPB* is its genuinely evangelical nature which leaves out those accretions in the Daily Offices that have been unhelpful and contrary to sound doctrine. Because the Daily Office takes time and patience and practice, we learn truly that prayer is work! Hard work, even! To pay attention to God's Word, to hear it and read it and meditate upon it is surely as demanding as preparing to preach, writing a Bible Study or visiting and caring for souls. And one can readily imagine that such a regular immersion into the Lord's Word will only benefit all those other tasks we have been called to undertake as Christ's faithful ministers.

O LORD, OPEN THOU MY LIPS

So how does one pray the offices? Whether you give it a go with just one or two or four Offices, the approach is the same. Since faith comes by hearing,¹⁰ the Office should be prayed out loud. The Psalms should be spoken or sung and the Scriptures read aloud. In short, you just pray through everything in the order out loud. Find a quiet place free from distractions. Have your Scriptures readily at hand and off you go.

If you start off simply, you might just pray the Office as it is listed and then, as you grow into it, add the proper versicles, responses, responsories, antiphons, etc. There is nothing wrong with stopping in the office, looking up where you should be, finding the next page, experimenting with the chant tones, etc. As said before: Prayer is work. Learning the Offices is work. But the payoff is tremendous.

⁸LC 328.3.

⁹LW vol. 43.

¹⁰Rom. 10:17.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

I will offer, for the sake of example, a detailed guide to praying Morning Prayer as one would do so alone. Bear with the details and remember that what seems complicated is only so until one gets the hang of it! For this illustration, I will choose Morning Prayer for today (it happens to be the Monday of the Second Week in Lent as I write this). If you are praying alone, you will say both the versicles and the responses. All the parts of the choir are yours. (Although I am an ordained minister, since I do not usually pray the office with others or lead the service, but pray by myself, I pray the office as if there is no ordained preacher there). Some definitions: The Ordinary is the part of the service that never changes. The Propers change each week or on Festival days. For “Green” seasons, the versicles and responses, Responsories, and hymns are taken from the Weekday Propers (beginning on page 264). During other seasons of the Church Year, one can use the Propers that are Seasonal (page 296). If appropriate, Saints propers would be used. For the following example, go ahead and open your prayer book and examine each part and page as it is mentioned, to get a feel for what each part is and how to navigate the book.

Morning Prayer: Opening Versicles and Responses

The Ordinary—the basic service outline—for Morning Prayer (Lauds) begins on page 25. Pray the “O Lord, open Thou my lips” and the responses. “Praise to thee...” is used instead of the Alleluia since we are in a penitential season (Lent).

Psalmody

Next the Psalms are prayed. Looking at the chart on page 61 (remember, there are little “post it” tabs marking these sections so I can easily flip to them), I see that in Week 3 (where I currently am) the Canticle 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 is prayed, followed by Psalms 32, 47 and 70. The Canticles and Psalms are prayed as follows: Speak (or sing) the Antiphon (a “thematic verse” for the Psalm) then pray the Psalm. Pray slowly, meditating upon the words as you go. Hear Christ speaking these words. Make these words your own. Recognize these words as the words of your brothers and sisters in Christ from all times and places. Then pray the Gloria Patri (Glory be...) and the antiphon again. After a suitable silence to meditate upon the words or to repeat words which stand out, pray the Psalm prayer. Do this for each Canticle and Psalm. On Sundays and Feasts, you may choose to use antiphons which reflect the season. The Lenten Psalm antiphons, for example, are on page 313. Though this involves a bit of page flipping, it helps place the words of the psalm in the context of Christ's redeeming work commemorated through the Church Year.

Scripture Reading

The Lection (reading) is from the Holy Scriptures. Read aloud whatever portion of the Scriptures you have chosen (in my own case it is the Book of James today). Then say the word, “But thou O Lord, etc.” This prayer reminds us that Christ has mercy upon us by giving us His Word to hear. On a Festival or Sunday, it is appropriate to read the Holy Gospel for the Day as the last reading. (So I might read James and then whatever Gospel is appointed for today if today were a feast or Sunday).

The Responsory

The Responsory is a seasonal set of verses and responses following God's Word. Ordinarily, one would use the responsory corresponding to the day of the week. Since we are in Lent, there is a Responsory for the Season of Lent. It is found on page 315. The way you pray is to read everything up to the first “R.” Where there is an “R” repeat everything. Where there is a

double cross, repeat just the portion of the responsory after that double cross.

Reading from the Fathers

In a congregational setting a sermon would go here or a reading from the Fathers. In private prayer, one might read their confessions here or some other devotional or patristic reading.

The Hymn

The hymns are contained in the Weekday Propers. Again, since it is Lent, there are hymns proper to the season available. The Hymn suggested for Morning Prayer could either be the one for Monday: Morning Prayer (page 268) or the Morning Prayer Hymn from Lent 1 on page 316 (this hymn is suggested for Lent 2). Of course, you might sing something out of the hymnal too. Our classic Lutheran hymnody should by no means be neglected. For my own part, I relish the fact that there are a great deal of hymns in the *BPB* so I don't have to carry an additional book for singing. A reminder: Most of the hymns are Long Meter and easily singable to a variety of familiar hymn tunes. One could certainly also speak the hymn and meditate upon its words as with a Psalm.

The Canticle

There are three Gospel Canticles sung in the Daily Offices. If you pray four offices, you will sing these. The Song of Zechariah, the Benedictus is always sung at Morning Prayer. The Song of Mary, the Magnificat, is sung at Evening Prayer. The Song of Simeon, the Nunc Dimittis, is sung at Compline. These three Gospel canticles bring us into the rhythm of Christ's saving work: The fulfillment of God's prophecies in the morning, the lifting up of the poor and lowly in the evening, and the preparation for sleep and death at Compline. A practical note for singing the Gospel Canticles: They are the same wording (King James English) as found in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. If you have not yet learned the pointing and chant tones in the *BPB* sing the canticles to their familiar *TLH* tunes.

To sing the Canticle, first pray the Versicle and Response. Again, these are proper, so we will find today's on page 318. Then sing or speak the Antiphon, also proper (page 318). Sing the canticle and then sing or speak the antiphon again. It bears repeating: though it sounds like a lot of flipping pages to find little bits, the reward is the immersion of our lips and ears into the saving words of Christ reflected in the particular season of the Church Year.

The Prayers, The Suffrages, The Salutation, The Collect of the Day, The Collect for Grace

Pray the Kyrie and the Lord's Prayer. During penitential seasons, pray the Suffrages. Alone, I use the second option, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, etc." Then pray the collect for the day. In this case it is the Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent (page 318). The suggestion for 3, 5 or 7 total collects suggests that 1, 3 or 5 be prayed in addition to the Collect for the Week/Festival and the Collect for Grace in the Morning Prayer ordinary. Here is where the Collects for All Occasions come in handy. My own practice is to select collects for particular needs and people. One can certainly vary how many and what subjects are chosen. Certainly one might offer their own petitions and concerns here as well. For my own part, I cling tight to those collects in which the church catholic has put down her sighs and groanings in strong words that have stood the test of time.

The Salutation and The Benedicamus

Again, in "solo" devotions, the second option. The Benedicamus is also said to wrap up

the prayer office. As mentioned before, my own practice has been to conclude with the *Benedicamus*, even though I am an ordained minister, since The Benediction is not given to others here. The Office may conclude with silent prayer.

The Commemoration of the Saints and the Departed and the Commemoration of the BVM

After any morning Office—Vigils, Morning Prayer, or Prime, if Midday is prayed early—one may commemorate the Saints and departed. One can also commemorate the Blessed Virgin Mary after any office. These are evangelical and proper additions to the Office in which we might remember saints in a godly way, while avoiding the error of actually invoking the saints in our prayers when such worship properly belongs to Christ alone. I am grateful to the authors of the *BPB* for wording these commemorations and their attendant versicles in a way which remembers the particular saint while giving all glory to God for His mercy and gifts.

HE HAS PUT A NEW SONG IN MY MOUTH

One can do all of the above by speaking all the parts of the office. Those unfamiliar with chanting will surely be inclined to at least sing the hymn. Those familiar with *TLH* will be readily equipped to sing the Gospel Canticles. Those familiar with the Psalm tones from *Lutheran Worship* could use them to sing the Psalms, antiphons, and responsories.¹¹ One could even sing the other parts of the ordinary to the *TLH* Matins and Vespers tunes. Yet the *BPB* is pointed in Gregorian notation. Not knowing much about music, there is a steep learning curve for me. I have found, since I have no formal musical training, that the best way to learn is by imitation. The Lutheran Liturgical Prayer Brotherhood website is continually being loaded with computer files (MP3s) which contain the chanted music. All of the ordinary parts of the Offices are now available as are many hymns. Each of the Psalm Tones is given an example. You can pray those particular psalms and learn the tones, which are used for all of the rest of the Psalms.

Thus one can sing a little bit of the Office and gradually learn more. As with any new tunes and melodies and ways of singing, meditating upon the words is difficult when the singing is being learned. But as anyone can attest, what is first difficult and unfamiliar quickly becomes familiar and of a second-nature. In my own experience, as I “experiment” with the online music files, and imitate them, I find that I am more inclined to sing the offices and to sing more of them as I get the hang of it. If I know a tune, I can pretty well sight read in a hymnal or at least figure out what tune it is. Not so easily with Gregorian chant! However, I have to agree with the authors of the *BPB* that this particular chant and notation really does lend itself to praying to music. Chanting in the Gregorian fashion is a manner of music somewhere between speaking and singing which, as I have slowly found, does enhance one's prayer and meditation.

You will have come a long way to be able to sing each of the Prayer Offices in their entirety. This is part of what makes the *BPB* a resource that you will grow into throughout your entire life!

THIS I SAY, I AND NOT THE LORD

There are some particular features of the *BPB* that are worth commenting upon. The first is language. The authors point out that the Jacobean English (King James English) used will never be more out of date than it already is and thus the *BPB* is protected against the whims of modern translations, most of which are mere fads, in my opinion. One who is raised on more modern translations will have more to wrestle with in reading such language. Those who use *TLH* will have little difficulty in adapting. Surely for printing purposes and costs, the Scripture

¹¹ See <http://www.llpb.us/Resources%20for%20Prayer%20Book.htm>

readings were not included in the *BPB*. The authors note that this allows any translation that is preferred to be read. It also allows one to use a lectionary other than that which is in the *BPB*.¹² Someone has suggested that perhaps a companion volume will be produced with all of the Scripture and Patristic readings. I hope someone will take up that challenge.

Finally, since the *BPB* has a generous congregational use license (up to 25% of the book may be copied for use in worship, retreats, etc.) the goal of praying the offices with other Christians is certainly attainable. What joy it would be to teach God's people the best of the Western Daily Prayer tradition! Thanks to the rich resources of the *BPB* we can begin such a task.

MORE TO BE DESIRED THAN MUCH FINE GOLD

I hope this guide has inspired you to take a closer look at the *BPB*. You cannot but be blessed by using any of its rich treasures. And treasures they are because it is the Holy Scriptures at the heart of it. I shall close with more words of Dr. Luther to remind us of our great need for prayer, encouraged by his own example:

[W]hen I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my little psalter, hurry to my room, or, if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and, if I have time, some words of Christ or of Paul, or some psalms, just as a child might do.¹³

May the *Brotherhood Prayer Book* be used to become children like that! For of such is the kingdom of God.

S + D + G

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¹²I recommend for pastors especially another daily lectionary option; see the website:
<http://www.llpb.us/Resources%20for%20Prayer%20Book.htm>

¹³LW 43, *A Simple Way to Pray*.