

## HOW TO MAKE A HOLY HOUR

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus experienced bitter pain and anguish as He prepared for His Passion and death. Many spiritual writers suggest that a part of that pain and anguish arose because Jesus was able to see all of those who would reject His love and salvation. He also could see the many sins and offences that would be committed by His followers despite the grace He was to make available to them. Jesus had taken His closest friends with Him to this place of prayer. He had asked them to keep watch and pray that "you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:40). However the disciples could not remain awake, so they slept while Jesus was "greatly distressed and troubled" (Mark 14:33). When Jesus saw them sleeping He said "Are you asleep? Could you not watch for one hour?" (Mark 14:37).

Certainly we are busy. There are many demands on our time. However, Our Lord remains faithfully present in the Eucharist that is reserved in the tabernacles of the churches. He, a willing "prisoner of love", awaits us. He sees the sins of the world and offers forgiveness, grace, and life. He waits. Can we not wait with Him for one hour?

Churches throughout the world have established programmes of perpetual adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. People volunteer for one hour per week to be with Jesus Who is truly present in the tabernacle. ... Why spend a holy hour before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament? There is only one answer and it is simple. Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is present. As St Thomas Aquinas said: "He cares for us and is there."

If there is a once-a-week devotion for you (it can be more often!), it is valuable to establish a specific day and time. Treat it as an appointment you have made with your friend, Jesus. You would not want to "stand up" your friend.

How to spend that hour in prayer? There is no set formula. You can use a prayer book or the Bible to help you. You can meditate or just sit and enjoy the peace that comes from resting in the presence of God. One man described to St John Vianney (the Curé d'Ars) his time of prayer before the tabernacle as: "I look at Him Whom I love and He looks at me."

Whatever your approach and it probably will help to try different ones in the beginning, it's important not to become discouraged. We are among the most over-stimulated generations in the world's history. Silence, contemplation, inviting Christ to enter our hearts and minds can seem alien to us, foolish, and difficult. Almost all of us, in the beginning, will want to fidget. Almost all will experience wandering thoughts, even temptations! Don't worry, they don't matter. All that matters is that you are there, and you are there with good intent.

We have forgotten as Christians how much God loves a pure heart, or even an impure heart that we have only begun to ask Him to purify. God is not terribly impressed by our success (since He is the author of all success) but He loves it when we try. In the end if we make a distracted, worried, or sleepy holy hour we do much better than if we not make any at all.

One approach is to divide the hour into 15 minute segments. This is handy because its possible to start not with an hour but with the first 15 minutes. Take the **first** 15 minutes to meditate upon Him Who is present in the Holy Eucharist. Consider the marvel of this reality: Christ the God-Man is truly present in His divinity as well as in His sacred humanity. He is present body and soul. Try to realize how this unique presence of Jesus in the tabernacle is different from the presence of God in the world, or from His presence in us by grace, or from His presence in the Church or in Scripture. Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is unique - different from His presence anywhere else. Consider Who Jesus is as God: Creator, Redeemer, Saviour, our Brother, Our Lord and King of the universe. Join familiar prayers of worship with your thoughts. Reflect on the words of some hymns of praise and adoration such as:

"Down in Adoration Falling", "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name", "Now Thank We All Our God", etc. Read the words slowly and thoughtfully. Pause and allow your heart to embrace Him Who resides in the tabernacle.

For the **second** 15 minutes turn to prayers of thanksgiving. Give thanks to God for His presence in the Eucharist. Thank Our Lord for the Mass, the Sacraments, the Church, and the priesthood. Use the Magnificat or the Canticle of Zachariah (Benedictus) as helps in your thanksgiving. Recall His blessings to you: family, vocation, the gift of life, opportunity to be in His presence, friends, benefactors, etc. Thank Him for the help He provides in struggles and temptations.

Dedicate the **third** segment of the holy hour to prayers of petition. Pray first that God's will be done in your life and in the lives of those closest to you. Remember the needs of family and friends, and bring forth the needs of the Church both local and universal. Pray for our pastor, the bishop, and the pope. You may also pray for conversions and for the return to the faith of those who have wandered. Include prayer for the sick, the lonely, the discouraged, young people the unborn, government officials, co-workers. Pray that you may know God's will and may be a channel of His grace to others. Pray for peace. Know that He hears your prayers. You can believe Jesus when He tells us: "Come to Me all you who labour and are burdened and I will refresh you!"

Let the **final** quarter of your time be set aside for "atonement". Sin is a grave offence to the justice of God. Jesus gave His life on the cross to atone for the sins and offences of man. He invites us to join in His atonement. Consider your own sins, and the insults, blasphemies, and defiance of men and women of our world in the face of the love of God. How often is love of neighbour ignored or even contradicted by abortion, hate, and immorality! Express your thoughts of sorrow to God. Say an Act of Contrition. The Litany of the Sacred Heart, the Litany of the Holy Name, and the Litany of the Blessed Mother are all helpful prayers. The Litany to the Saints and the Prayers to St Michael can also be used.

A holy hour spent before Our Lord in the tabernacle is time well spent. However, a holy hour can be observed at home. Sometimes family situations make it impossible to observe the hour at Church. It may be too difficult for smaller children. At home the prayer can be structured to include the children in singing hymns and recitation of the family Rosary. Unite your prayer to Jesus Who resides in the church tabernacle closest to your home - perhaps even facing in the direction of the Church as you pray.

The aged, sick, and handicapped are often unable to spend a holy hour at church. However, their prayer from home, when united with the offering of their infirmities, can be a powerful instrument for the work of God's grace. Many souls have been saved through the faithful prayer of those who are housebound.

Some may ask: What is the effect of a regular holy hour and the practice of other Eucharistic devotions? Isn't it somewhat a waste of time to spend an hour in Church when it could be used for more active "work"? Recall the story of the apostles in the Scripture when they spent the entire night fishing. With their best efforts they caught nothing (Luke 5:1-7). When Jesus arrived He ordered them to cast their nets one more time. Their catch was so great that it "filled both boats, so that they began to sink". The presence of Jesus brought a superabundance of life and blessing for the apostles.

It is the same with us. Our efforts in the work of God are important but unless Jesus is present and directing our action, there will be no results. As we spend time in the presence of Jesus, miracles can happen. As we spend time before the tabernacle, we grow in love of the Eucharist, and love for souls will be given us. Our hearts will be caught up in the work, life, and love of God.

[Extract from *The How-To Book of Catholic Devotions*]