

The Spiritual Value of Using the Agpeya for Praying

Objective:

- 🕒 Training on practicing prayers using the Agpeya (the book of hours and becoming enriched through them).

Memory Verse:

“Seven times a day I praise You because of Your righteous judgments” (Psalm 119:164).

Introduction:

The book of the Agpeya contains the seven prayers of the hours recited during the day and night. The word Agpeya is derived from the Coptic word “agp” meaning “hour”. These hours are seven according to David the prophet who says: “Seven times a day I praise You because of Your righteous judgments” (Psalm 119:164). The hours are: prime, terce, sext, none, vespers, compline, and midnight.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Wisdom Of The Church In Arranging The Agpeya Prayers Of The Hours

There is no doubt that the church set up, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the prayers of the seven hours for our spiritual benefit. These help us to increase in faith and stature until we reach the height and completeness of Christ Himself (Ephesians 4:13).

The Church has also arranged the prayers of the hours to enable her children to lead life of prayer and adhere to God being in constant communion with Him. Furthermore, the prayers include useful spiritual teachings.

II. Sources of prayers

The Church has drawn for the prayers in the Agpeya from three sources: the Psalms, the Gospels, and the prayers of the saintly and holy people.

The psalms come first in order and consist of twelve psalms (except the 1st hr which has 22), then a passage from one of the Gospels, followed by three or six prayers taken from the fathers. An absolution composed by one of the holy fathers is recited at the end, and is appropriate to the hour of the prayer.

III. Arrangement

The Hours have been arranged according to the most important events related to our Saviour Jesus Christ so that we are constantly reminded of God’s plans to redeem and save us. We will present a brief summary of each hour of the Agpeya below:

A. Prime, The Prayers of the First Hour

They are arranged in memory of the Lord’s resurrection from the dead. We therefore pray to thank God for having allowed us to pass the night safely and beg Him to protect us during the day. We pray that He will protect us from sin and give us peace.

B. Terce, The Prayers of the Third Hour

They are arranged by the Church in memory of three occasions:

- ⌚ The trial of Jesus Christ before Pontius Pilate and the decree to crucify Him (Psalm 15:25; Isaiah 53:7).
- ⌚ The Lord's ascension (Psalm 23).
- ⌚ The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples (Acts 2:15).

C. Sext, The Prayers of the Sixth Hour

They are arranged in memory of the crucifixion of Christ on the cross after bearing many sufferings, beatings and floggings. The Lord prayed on the cross (Luke 23:34). At that hour the Lord also led the Samaritan woman to repent (John 4).

C. None, The Prayers of the Ninth Hour

They are in memory of Christ's redeeming death, which was necessary to achieve our salvation.

D. Vespers, The Prayers of the Eleventh Hour (Prayers at Sunset)

They are arranged in memory of the hour when the Holy Body of Christ was brought down from the cross to be buried.

E. Compline, The Prayers of the Twelfth Hour (Bedtime Prayers)

They are arranged in memory of the burial of Christ's body after preparing it, and according to the words of the psalmist: "*on my bed I remember You*" (Psalm 63:6). This is also an hour of repentance before God at bedtime.

F. Midnight Prayers

They are arranged in accordance with the words of the psalmist, "I will rise late in the night to give thanks to You" (Psalm 119:62). The object of staying up late is meditation upon the divine Word, which helps us to lead a life of repentance and get ready for the second coming of our Lord.

IV. Some of the benefits and blessings of praying using the Agpeya

It is possible to discover the benefits and blessings obtained by following the Agpeya if we try the beauty and depth of prayer achieved in the process. Among these, the following will be noted:

A. The prolonged presence before the Lord

In our personal haphazard prayers, we stand before the Lord for a few minutes only. On the other hand, following the Agpeya gives us the opportunity to stay longer before God and enjoy a close relationship with Him (Psalm 37:4).

B. The inclusion of all forms of prayer

- ⌚ **Thanksgiving:** This is a special prayer at the beginning of all the prayers in the Agpeya, along with numerous verses giving thanks found in other psalms.
- ⌚ **Repentance and Humility:** This is in Psalm 50 (51) which is recited in the introduction of every hour just like the prayer of Thanksgiving. There are other numerous psalms dealing with this aspect throughout the Agpeya.
- ⌚ **Glorification and Praise:** There are many prayers said in this context such as the Three Holies, the Song of the Angels, and other psalms spread out in the various hours of prayer.

- ⌚ **Supplication:** This includes all the requests a person prays for as well as his needs in different situations, especially the need for forgiveness of sins - both hidden and apparent as well as seeking God's help to save us from envy and temptation.

C. Praying fervently for mercy

At the end of every hour, the person repeats forty one times the words "Lord have mercy." By praying fervently, we know that the Lord will not return our prayers unanswered. Jesus underlined that in the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-7).

D. Praying in accordance with God's Will

If your prayers are in accordance with God's will, then *"the Lord will hear your prayer in the day of trouble and the name of the God of Jacob will keep you safe..."* (Psalm 20:1-5).

E. Lessons on how to pray

The Psalm says, *"Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with tremble. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him"* (Psalm 2:11,12).

F. There is an element of preaching in the prayers of the Agpeya

This refers to didactic and preaching trend besides that of worship and contemplation. This complies with the advice of the apostle *"but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"* (Hebrews 3:13).

G. Being spiritually preoccupied all day long

Most people remember the Lord at the start and at the end of the day. As for the rest of the day, it is occupied with conflicts and worries so that there is no time for prayer. Therefore, our mother, the Church, who is concerned about our joy and salvation, invites us to pray all day long by providing the Agpeya, the Book of the seven canonical prayers.

H. A healthy and spiritual meal

One of the Church fathers likens the Agpeya, to a nourishing meal and goes on to say that it is the attire of a wedding that qualifies us and directs our thoughts and feelings so that we can enjoy the blessings of this invitation. This attire consists of a dress, a belt, and shoes: The dress stands for the Lord's prayer, the belt stands for the prayer of thanksgiving, and the shoes stand for the prayer of repentance.

I. A dialogue with God

"Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness, You have relieved me in my prayer" (Psalm 4:1).

J. Countless spiritual benefits

Through prayers based on the Agpeya, we learn to live a life of faith. Our hearts are filled with peace and security and we draw various spiritual lessons.

V. The reasons that led the Church to use the Psalms in Prayers

The Church has chosen to use the book of Psalms in all prayers for many reasons, some of which are:

- ⌚ In the character of David there is a combination of astonishing experiences, he was a shepherd, a great king, an inspired prophet, a saint, and a human being tried

by temptations. These experiences find an echo in our psychological make-up and needs.

- ⌚ The psalms are the Words of God conveyed to David by the Holy Spirit and this is what Jesus clarified by His own words, “David being led by the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 22:43).
- ⌚ The Psalms contain the element of thanksgiving, the language of angels and spiritual beings.
- ⌚ The Psalms provide a wonderful opportunity for contemplation to those who pray them sincerely, for the Spirit of God is their source.

VI. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our model

- ⌚ Our Lord Jesus Christ is our Great Teacher of prayer who spent all night long in prayer (Luke 6:12).
- ⌚ He used to pray in the early morning as it is written. “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35).
- ⌚ Jesus prayed at the sixth hour (Luke 23:34) and He also prayed at the ninth hour (Luke 23:46).
- ⌚ He used to pray at night (Matthew 14:23). In the midnight prayer He observed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He offered three consecutive vigils (Matthew 26:36-45). To emphasize the midnight prayers, He gave us the parable of the wise virgins (Matthew 25:13).
- ⌚ Thus, Jesus set firm foundations for prayer and worship (1 Corinthians 14:4), and organized it for us. For He is a God of peace and order and He is not a God of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:3). That explains why He has left us a model to follow (1 Peter 2:21) in order to enable us to walk in His steps.

VII. The Ideal Way Of Praying With The Help Of The Agpeya

How to pray in an ideally correct way using the Agpeya without being burdened or bored by routine. We mention below a few rules or conditions:

- ⌚ Have your own prayer book of the Agpeya next to your bed and note down on the margin your own contemplation or interpretations that help you understand and meditate.
- ⌚ Even if you have memorized the prayers by heart, look at the pages and use all your senses while saying them so that you are not distracted.
- ⌚ Say your prayers aloud to prevent your mind from wandering. Do not say them quickly, otherwise you could miss the pleasure and spirituality of prayer and do not mumble the words.
- ⌚ Reciting the psalms to music or chanting them is important as this provides comfort and consolation.
- ⌚ Read some interpretations and studies related to the psalms and gospels to help clarify ambiguous verses.
- ⌚ Lift up your eyes, heart, thoughts, your hands, and your whole being towards heaven. This will allow you to live some moments in heaven while you are still on earth, and conquer through perseverance all the army of the evil one as well as their wicked head.

- ⌚ Repeat the sweet name of Our Lord Jesus Christ during prayer, every time you say “God” follow up by “Jesus Christ”.
- ⌚ It would be convenient to make the sign of the Cross and kneel down to the floor every time you give glory to God.
- ⌚ Beat on your chest in humility every time you mention sin and offer repentance. Ask for mercy by saying, for example, “have mercy upon me, according to Your great mercy, O God”.
- ⌚ It is preferable to say all the prayers included in each hour, though you could consult your confession father . Do not neglect to say a spontaneous prayer at the end of your prayers in which you have recited the psalms.
- ⌚ If you are behind, you could compensate the hours you have missed by’ saying them at any other time. This is useful and good and you may want to sit quietly after that to achieve some rest - spiritual and physical.