

PREFACE

The heart of Christian worship is the Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy, which from the earliest times brought the followers of Christ together to build and rebuild his Body in their midst. The Divine Liturgy was the focal point at which Christian prayer departed from Judaism, taking with it elements from the prayer services of the synagogue and, more importantly, from the worship of the Temple. In a very important sense the Eucharist is a constantly repeated Day of Atonement, where sacramental action realizes the oneness of the people with God.

Over the centuries, alongside morning and evening prayer and the Eucharist, there developed a complex system of monastic prayer designed to structure the worship of a praying community. An important element in this was the 'Prayer of the Hours', shorter services spread out during the day and through the evening and night. In the Christian East, the full sequence on ordinary days would be: Vespers, Compline, the Midnight Office, Matins, the First Hour, Third Hour, Sixth Hour, the Typika or Divine Liturgy, and the Ninth Hour.

It is important to note that according to the ancient reckoning of time the First Hour corresponds roughly to six in the morning, the Third to nine in the morning, the Sixth to midday and the Ninth Hour to three in the afternoon. In the Russian tradition it is customary, in parish use, to add the First

Hour to the All-night Vigil and to read the Third and Sixth Hours before the Divine Liturgy. Even in monastic communities, of course, these services are often grouped together for convenience, depending on strength and numbers. The Ninth Hour, for example, is often read before Vespers.

The present collection of texts gives the standard form of the Hours and the Typika. They can be used in parishes for common prayer, and by any believer in their own home, as well as by monks and nuns living on their own (and if the *Octoechos* and *Menaion* are available, troparia and kontakia can be used as appointed). In every case they provide a simple way of integrating one's prayer with that of the wider Church throughout the world. It is hoped that in this easily used form the present text will serve to strengthen the prayer of the Church in forms that have been used for centuries by very ordinary Christians and by saints.

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