



Prot. No. 0073/2023

Circular

Liturgy of the Hours

Cardinal George Alencherry,
the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church
to the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Men
and Women and Lay Faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It was intimated in the last Post-Synodal Circular (Prot.No.0029/2023) that the newly revised Liturgy of the Hours would come into effect from February 19, 2023, the First Sunday of Lent. In the background of that intimation, I would like to share with you a few things on the revised Liturgy of the Hours and its special features.

Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours remains in the Church from ancient times as streams of spirituality, spreading the spirit of the Holy *Qurbana* through the hours of the day and night, sanctifying our daily lives through the praise of God. The Congregation for the Eastern Churches had published in 1939 the Liturgy of the Hours in Syriac which was edited by Fr. Paul Budjan, a Lazarist priest, in 1886 & 1887, for the use of the Syro-Malabar and Chaldean Churches. As per the direction of Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, the Prefect of the then Congregation for the Eastern Churches who visited Kerala in 1953, attempts were made to translate the Liturgy of the Hours in Syriac into Malayalam. The Syro-Malabar Bishops' Conference (SMBC) in its meeting in 1973 took the decision to translate it into Malayalam. The Liturgical Committee that was formed for this purpose published in 1986 under the title, *The Syro-Malabar Liturgy of the Hours*. But before 1986, some parts of the Liturgy of the Hours in Syriac were translated into Malayalam and published in three volumes under the title *Canonical Prayers* for the use of the clergy and the religious. Although these two texts had all the features of the original Syriac version, they were not fully conformed to the original Syriac version. The prayers and the hymns proper to the different Seasons, days and feasts could not be included fully. Hence, the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church decided in 2007 to prepare a revised text of the Liturgy of the Hours, which would remain true to the original Syriac Text.

The August Session of the Synod in 2014 directed the Commission for Liturgy to proceed with the revision of the Liturgy of the Hours. Further, the Synod approved the

general structure of the solemn form and a short version of the Liturgy of the Hours. The Synod also appointed a Special Committee of eight Bishops to examine the revision of the text. The Central Liturgical Committee appointed a Subcommittee with the mandate to translate the prayers from its sources in Syriac. The prayers and hymns were written based on the existing translations, examining them on the basis of their original sources in Syriac. The draft prepared by the Subcommittee was studied in depth by the Central Liturgical Committee which consisted of theologians, liturgists, and representatives of priests, the religious and the laity. Besides, the members of the Central Liturgical Committee met several times at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad and made corrections of the linguistic expressions used in the prayers and hymns by reciting the prayers and singing the hymns. The Special Committee of the Bishops went over the draft prepared by the Central Liturgical Committee and made several corrections after reciting the prayers and singing the hymns several times in their meetings.

This revised text was approved at the Second Session of the XXX Synod held from 16 to 25 August 2022. In order to gather further suggestions in the revised text, the drafts of the solemn form and shorter version were sent to all the Bishops and the Major Superiors of the religious congregations requesting to send their responses before October 30, 2022. The Special Committee examined the suggestions received and incorporated necessary changes and published the final text of the Liturgy of the Hours on the Feast of *Denaha* in January 2023.

Towards the Spirit of the Liturgy of the Hours

The primary basis of the prayers and the songs of the Liturgy of the Hours is the Word of God itself. They are also filled with the interpretations of and meditations on the Word of God by the Fathers of the Church. The Liturgy of the Hours is, hence, the public celebration of the Word of God. It can be said without any doubt that the Liturgy of the Hours does help us to reflect on the Word of God as well as to make us come closer to a life that is permeated with the Word of God. The prayers in the Liturgy of the Hours will help us, by coming closer to the mind of the Church, to immerse into the spirit of the Word of God and its interpretations.

Separate prayers for each day along with those for important feasts of the liturgical Seasons are included in the text of the Liturgy of the Hours. Even though the text is a bit oversized on account of the variety of prayers, the time for recitation of daily prayers has not increased. Along with the solemn and ordinary forms of the prayers, the Synod has also approved a short version of the text for use of special occasions like travels.

In the tradition of our Church, there are prayers to be said on seven times of the day. But the Synod has approved and published the prayers only for three times of the day. They are *Ramsa* (evening prayer), *Lelia* (night prayer) and *Sapra* (morning prayer). They were the ones officially in use in our Church. That is why they are published in

two volumes for the faithful after revising them to make sure they are truly faithful to the sources. The first volume beginning with the Season of Annunciation to the Season of Resurrection is centered on the mystery of Christ while the second volume beginning from the Season of the Apostles to the Dedication of the Church is centered on the mystery of the Church. The second volume will be published soon.

As the Liturgy of the Hours is prayer of the faithful, it should be recited at the cathedrals and in the churches every day especially on Sundays and on the days of obligation as per the directives of Canon Law (CCEO c.199 §2). I appeal to all the priests, the religious and the laity to use the revised text for the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours.

May the good God bless all of us who are now preparing to enter the spirit of the Season of Lent! May the intercession of Holy Mary, the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ and our mother, and St. Thomas, our Father in faith, be a source of help to all of us! Let us praise the Lord through praises and psalms.

Given this from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad on February 5, 2023.



Cardinal George Alencherry
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church



The content of this circular shall be communicated in all the parish churches, institutions, religious houses, formation centres and the major seminaries of the Syro-Malabar Church during the Holy *Qurbana* on Sunday, February 12, 2023.