



AGPEYA GUIDE

BOOK OF HOURS

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

In any area of life, growth requires consistency. And consistency requires discipline. It is upon this principle that the fathers of the Church laid out for us a rich collection of prayers for set times throughout the day. In the Coptic Orthodox tradition, that collection is called the "Agpeya."

The word "Agpeya" comes from the Coptic word which means "the hour". Thus, the Agpeya is also referred to as the "Book of Hours." It contains seven prayers to be said at different hours throughout the day - each with its own theme based on an event from the life of Christ.

The first six "hours" are to be prayed from sunrise to sunset - between the hours of 6 am and 6 pm.

- 1st hour (6 am): resurrection of Christ (Mark 16:2)
- 3rd hour (9 am): descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:15)
- 6th hour (12 pm): crucifixion of our Lord (John 9:14)
- 9th hour (3 pm): death of our Lord (Matthew 27:46)
- 11th hour (5 pm): removal of our Lord's body from the cross
- 12th hour (6 pm): burial of our Lord in a tomb

The seventh prayer is the Prayer of the Midnight Hour and is divided into three services - corresponding to the three times our Lord prayed in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:44).

For the most part, each hour is comprised of the following:

- The Lord's Prayer
- The Prayer of Thanksgiving
- The Psalm of Repentance (Psalm 50)
- A collection of 12-19 psalms
- A gospel reading
- Litanies related to the theme of that hour
- Absolutions and Concluding Prayers

Benefits of the Agpeya

In his book "The Idealism and Spirituality of the Agpeya", His Holiness Pope Shenouda III enumerates several benefits to using the Agpeya. Such as:

- Giving us an opportunity to prolong our stay in God's Presence

- Teaching us to be balanced in our prayers (intercession, repentance, thanksgiving, repentance, etc.)
- Providing a unified way for the members of the church to join in one prayer
- Instilling our ancient faith in us and allowing us to share the mind of our church fathers.

Benefits of the Agpeya

"Do not concern yourself with the number of prayers read, but only lift your heart and mind to the Lord in prayer, and continue in a worthy manner for the time set aside. A few prayers, correctly read, are better than many prayers raced through." - St. Theophan the Recluse

There are two parts to every prayer: the form (what we pray) and the spirit (how we pray it). The Agpeya provides us with the form; but we must make sure to join it with the proper spirit.

Start small

Think of the Agpeya as a tool box, not a set of handcuffs. You have access to all the prayers, but you don't have to use them all every day. Start small and build up.

Focus on quality, not quantity

The goal isn't to rush through the words and say as many prayers as you can. Focus on WHAT you're saying, not HOW MUCH you've said.

Incorporate your senses

Engage your body through prostrations and making the sign of the cross. Engage your eyes with icons. Engage your mouth and your ears by reciting the prayers audibly, in a soft voice.

Use the Agpeya even/especially if you're tired and don't feel like praying

Elisabeth Elliot once wrote: "Recently I found that I often treat prayer as though it were a sport like skiing –something you do if you like it, something you do in your spare time, something you do if you can afford the trouble, something you do if you're good at it...But prayer isn't a sport. It's work. Prayer is no game... Prayer is the opposite of leisure. It's something to be engaged in, not indulged in. It's a job you give priority to. It's performing when you have energy left for nothing else."

Resources to help

BOOK: [A Beginner's Guide to Prayer](#) by Fr. Michael Keiser

BOOK: [Beginning to Pray](#) by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom

SERMON VIDEO: [Structured Prayer](#) by Fr. Anthony Messeh

SERMON VIDEO: [Summer Packing List](#) by Fr. Anthony Messeh

We overestimate what prayer will do in the short term – in a day. And we underestimate what it will do in the long term – over the course of a week or a month or a year.