

The Hours

In the main cycle of services by which we mark the liturgical day the main services are Vespers, which begins the day at sundown, and Matins, which now incorporates the ancient service of Lauds to form the main morning service. These are the two pivotal services throughout the course of the day, incorporating the evening and morning raising of incense in the Jerusalem Temple. The climax of the day's services is the Divine Liturgy.

However, marking certain periods of the daytime are the lesser services of the Hours. The names of these services reflect the method of keeping time that is traditional in Orthodox rubrics. This is not the modern method of referring to "9 o' clock", for instance, but is based on the theoretical standardisation of sunrise at 6 o' clock in the morning. All times throughout the daytime (which is treated as distinct from the night-time in service rubrics) are counted from that point. So, to use a familiar example, on Holy Saturday, the rubrics call for the Vespereal Liturgy of St Basil to be served at "about the tenth hour of the day", which by modern reckoning is 4 o' clock in the afternoon – ten hours after 6 a.m. (In reality, most parishes serve this Liturgy somewhat earlier to give the clergy and people a chance to rest before the long night vigil.)

With this reckoning borne in mind, the significance of the names of the Hours should become clear:

- **The First Hour** – the canonical time for this is about 6 o' clock in the morning, for this is the first hour of the daytime. Being read at dawn, the first Hour includes references to Christ, the True Light Who comes into the world. Liturgically, the first Hour is read at the end of the All-night Vigil, which, in modern parish practice, ends late in the night due to the shortening of the services as a pastoral concession. However, in traditional monasteries, where the Vigil is usually served in full, the end is indeed usually at about dawn.
- **The Third Hour** – the canonical time for the Third Hour is about 9 o' clock in the morning. In its Lenten weekday form, the Third Hour contains the troparion prayed by the priest at the consecration of the Gifts in the Divine Liturgy, which is a reference to the day of Pentecost: *"O Lord, Who didst send down thy Most Holy Spirit at the third hour to thine Apostles, take Him not away from us, O Good One, but renew Him in us who pray to Thee."*
- **The Sixth Hour** – the canonical time for this Hour is about noon. It includes Psalm 90, which refers to "the noonday devil", which the fathers write of as a temptation to despondency often suffered by monastics at about noon. The Lenten weekday form of this Hour also includes a troparion referring to the nailing of the Saviour to the Cross at about noon. In current liturgical practice, the Sixth Hour is read immediately after the Third Hour, prior to the Divine Liturgy.
- **The Ninth Hour** – the canonical time for this hour is about 3 o' clock in the afternoon. The concluding prayer of the Ninth Hour refers to the death of the Saviour on the Cross at the ninth hour of Great and Holy Friday.

The Hours all follow the same basic structure and contain hardly any variation at all from day to day, with the common exception that, at all services from Pascha until Vespers of Pentecost, "Glory..." and "O Heavenly King" are not read, and that from Pascha until its Leave-taking, the paschal troparion "Christ is risen from the dead..." is read three times in their place. Below is a general instruction for making the usual variations on Sundays, when we usually celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord.

At each Hour, after the third psalm, with its threefold "Alleluia", and the threefold "Lord, have mercy", the appointed troparion of the Resurrection in the tone of the week is read between "Glory..." and "Both now...". Then, after the Trisagion Prayers and *Our Father*, the kontakion of the Resurrection in the tone of the week is read. This is the same at all of the Hours throughout the day.

However, if there is a saint or a feast being commemorated in addition to the Resurrection, the following changes are made:

- Two troparia are read: that of the Resurrection is transposed to **before** "Glory...", while that of the saint is sung between "Glory..." and "Both now...". Even if it is not a Sunday, if there are two troparia, the higher-ranking one is always read first.
- Because there is never more than one kontakion at any Hour, the kontakion of the Resurrection and the kontakion of the saint are alternated throughout the day, also beginning with the higher-ranking one. So the kontakion of the Resurrection is read at the First Hour, that of the saint at the Third Hour, that of the Resurrection at the Sixth, and so forth. (There are two variant practices here. In the first, only the kontakion of the Resurrection is read at the Sunday Hours, even if there is a saint. In the second practice, only the Sunday kontakion is read if the saint is not of polyelei rank or higher in the calendar. At our parish, we follow the second practice.)

Please note that a Great Feast of the Lord is never combined with any other observance in the liturgical cycle but always completely replaces it. This includes the Sunday celebration of the Resurrection. Therefore, on such feasts, only the troparion and kontakion **of the feast** are read, even if it is a Sunday. The only feasts which, falling on a Sunday, supersede the celebration of the Resurrection are:

- The Elevation of the Holy Cross – 14th September (27th September)
- The Nativity of the Lord – 25th December (7th January)
- The Theophany of the Lord – 6th January (19th January)
- The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem – (Palm Sunday) this is always a Sunday.
- The Descent of the Holy Spirit – (Pentecost) this is always a Sunday.
- The Transfiguration of the Lord – 6th August (19th August)

On these days, there will be none of the usual Sunday hymns or prayers of the Resurrection in any of the services, but only those of the feast. (The Ascension of the Lord, while having the same rank as the above feasts, is always a Thursday so is not

listed here. The remaining five Great Feasts are of the Mother of God. They have the same rank as Great Feasts of the Lord in most respects but they never replace the Resurrection if they fall on a Sunday. Instead, they are combined with the Resurrection.)