

Placement of The Psalm Prayer  
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A frequent question we hear is “does the psalm prayer come before or after the second antiphon?”

First, a little history is needed. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was the very first document promulgated by Vatican Council II. This enabled those assigned the task of reforming the liturgy to get started fairly quickly. In fact, the group who worked on the Liturgy of the Hours was even able to go back to the bishops during later sessions of Vatican II and have the bishops try out versions of the revised LOH.

As work progressed on the LOH, there was no news from the person writing the psalm prayers regarding his progress. Finally, the LOH and the General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours (GILOH) were promulgated without the psalm prayers but with the intent that the prayers would be published later as a supplement (GILOH 112; Campbell 1995, pg. 168).

The General Instruction states “An ancient tradition provides a model for their (the psalm prayer) use: after the psalm a period of silence is observed, then the prayer gives a resumé and resolution of the thoughts and aspirations of those praying the psalms.” (GILOH 112) Later it indicates that the antiphon is to be said at the beginning, may be said between the strophes, or “the antiphon may be repeated at the end of the psalm”. (GILOH 123 – 125) However, these instructions still do not make clear whether the psalm prayer comes before or after that closing antiphon.

When the supplement was published, the American edition of the LOH (The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite, *New York: Catholic Book, 1975*) placed the psalm prayer before the second antiphon. The result is that many people (and even a few recent books about the LOH) place the psalm prayer before the antiphon.

A clue for the correct placement of the psalm prayer is found in the book From Breviary to Liturgy of the Hours by Stanislaus Campbell (*Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995*). This book gives a detailed history of the reform of the LOH and in a footnote we read “Canon Martimort indicated to this author, however, that it was clearly the mind of Group 9 that the psalm prayer occur *after* the antiphon (if used) and pause for silent prayer and not before the antiphon...The antiphon, said the canon, may be considered as almost part of the psalm, and it is erroneous to place it after the psalm prayer” (Campbell 1995, pg. 322).

The Group 9 mentioned in the footnote was the task force that worked on the LOH. Canon Aimé Martimort was served on various committees within Group 9 and was a Consultor of the Congregation for Divine Worship.

This shows that the psalm prayer was intended to come after the antiphon. Since the psalm prayers were published later and are considered optional (as an aid to

understanding the psalm in a predominantly Christian way (GILOH 111)), there are some communities (such as our friars) which do not include it when praying the LOH at all. However, due to the original printing of the psalm prayer before the antiphon, it has also become acceptable practice to include it prior to the second antiphon.

Given that neither the GILOH nor the Ordinary give specific instructions regarding the placement of the psalm prayer, all three practices (before or after the antiphon or not including it at all) are acceptable. There is no need for any community to change the placement of the psalm prayer from what their practice has always been. At the same time, it is also important to recognize that the variation is acceptable as well and not fault a community which uses one of the other options.