

OUR PRAYERS: The Canticle of Simeon

Deep in every human heart is a desire for the living God that expresses itself in prayer. In the Catholic tradition, some prayers have become classic expressions of what the human heart seeks. *Words of Faith: Our Prayers* explores prayers that for centuries have revealed a faith that fosters a deep, personal, growing, and loving relationship with Jesus Christ. These prayers teach us much about who we are and about the God to whom we belong.

—Keith J. Egan, Series Editor

We Pray

† Lord, now you let your servant go in peace;
 your work has been fulfilled:
 my own eyes have seen the salvation
 which you have prepared in the sight of every people:
 a light to reveal you to the nations
 and the glory of your people Israel (Luke 2:29–32).

Antiphon

Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake; watch over us as we sleep,
 that awake, we may keep watch with Christ,
 and asleep, rest in his peace.

—*The Liturgy of the Hours*

We Practice

The Latin name of this prayer is the *Nunc Dimittis*, drawn from its opening words, which mean “Now dismiss . . .” This canticle (hymn of praise) from the Gospel of Luke is prayed during Compline or Night Prayer. Compline is the last of the daily liturgical prayers or “Hours” that make up the Liturgy of the Hours (also called the Divine Office).

This canticle reveals the gratitude of Simeon, a devout Jew, for having lived long enough to see the long-awaited Savior. At the end of each day, Simeon’s words help deepen our gratitude for the blessings we have received during our service of the Lord.

The Canticle of Simeon is found in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke, and in addition to Night Prayer, it is used in the readings for the day on the feast of the Presentation, February 2. It is also a beautiful prayer to use when praying at the deathbed of a seriously ill person. There is great power and peace in the freedom of saying for a dying friend that now he or she is ready to be dismissed from this life and meet the Lord in heaven.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Liturgy of the Hours or Divine Office has undergone many changes since it was first standardized in the medieval Church. Current usage focuses on three major hours and between two and four minor hours:

The Office of Readings (formerly Matins) (*major hour*)

Lauds or Morning Prayer (*major hour*)

Daytime prayer, which can be one or all of:

Terce or Mid-Morning Prayer

Sext or Midday Prayer

None or Mid-Afternoon Prayer

Vespers or Evening Prayer (*major hour*)

Compline or Night Prayer