

**THE CHURCH PRAYS WITHOUT CEASING**  
**All Time is Holy**  
Youth Group Session Five

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**Lesson**

God lives in eternal time...the past, the present, the future, all are His, without passing away or being used up as our earthly time is. This is a very confusing idea for us, but all we need to understand is that, in God's hands, it makes sense and that we were created to be a part of this eternal life.

We know that we all are given time to live on earth. (It's much easier for us to understand this time: yesterday is gone, today is happening, and tomorrow will be here!) This time is one of God's most precious gifts to us, but we must remember that even though it is given to us to use, it still belongs to Him. Using our time in a way that is pleasing to God is one way that we pray without ceasing.

The Church helps us to understand that the gift of time is holy by dedicating special prayers and services to our hours and days. Our whole year follows a *cycle* of Feasts and fasts that help us live the important events in the life of Jesus Christ and His Church.

Most of us, and even most of our parishes, can't fully follow the daily cycle of prayer; we rely on monasteries to pray these services for us. We usually can, and should, try to follow the yearly cycle. When these Feasts come on days when we have work and school, we can ask our parish priest to help us find ways to celebrate them at home.

As we grow, we learn that certain times and certain places call for certain kinds of behavior. You don't act the same way in your classrooms as you do at a ball game. You don't act the same in church as you do hanging out at your best friend's house. You've learned this over the years, and now it comes naturally to you (well, maybe you still have to work at it a little bit!)

Learning about the yearly, weekly and daily cycles of the Church should help us to remember that all of our time is holy...whether we are using it to work, eat, study, play, sleep, or pray. As we think about this, it becomes much easier for us to try to behave as God wants us to: showing our love for Him by caring about others, sharing our talents, always doing the best we can, respecting His creation. And as this behavior starts to come naturally to us, we'll find ourselves getting closer to praying without ceasing!

**The Daily Cycle (the Daily Office)**

During the time of the New Testament, a day was divided into eight equal parts which matched the guard duties, or "watches," of Roman soldiers; each watch was three hours long. Starting at 6:00 a.m., the start of the day, these watches were called:

|  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Watch of the 1 <sup>st</sup> Hour - 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. | Evening Watch - 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.    |
| Watch of the 3 <sup>rd</sup> Hour - 9 a.m. to noon   | Midnight Watch - 9 p.m. to midnight |
| Watch of the 6 <sup>th</sup> Hour - noon to 3 p.m.   | Cockcrow Watch - midnight to 3 a.m. |
| Watch of the 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour - 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. | Morning Watch - 3 a.m. to 6 a.m.    |

These watches and hours are mentioned many times in the Bible. Read Mark 13:35; what times are mentioned?

Can you figure out at about what time Jesus died? (Matt 27:45-50) \_\_\_\_\_

At about what time did the Holy Spirit descend on the Apostles? (Acts 2:15) \_\_\_\_\_

| <b>Ancient Roman "Watch"</b> | <b>Our Modern Time</b> | <b>Liturgical Service</b> | <b>Theme</b>                          |
|------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Evening Watch                | 6 - 9 p.m.             | Vespers<br>Complines      | Creation/the Fall<br>Start of new day |
| Midnight Watch               | 9 p.m. - midnight      | Nocturnes                 |                                       |
| Cockcrow Watch               | midnight - 3 a.m.      | Midnight                  | The Resurrection                      |
| Morning Watch                | 3 - 6 a.m.             | Matins                    | Preparing ourselves<br>for Christ     |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Hour         | 6 - 9 a.m.             | First Hour                | the prayer of sunrise                 |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Hour         | 9 - 12 a.m.            | Third Hour                | Descent of the<br>Holy Spirit         |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> Hour         | noon - 3 p.m.          | Sixth Hour                | Christ's Passion/<br>Crucifixion      |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour         | 3 - 6 p.m.             | Ninth Hour                | The Death of Christ                   |

This table shows how the Roman watches and hours came to match the daily cycle of prayer. (Over the years, times have been shifted a bit and some services may be combined) How many of these have you heard of? Have you participated in any?

### **The Weekly Cycle**

Just as every hour of the day is blessed with special prayers, every day of the week is dedicated to someone or something that helps us remember God's great love for us.

#### **Sunday - the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ**

Every Sunday is a "little Pascha," a remembrance of the Resurrection. Each of the Tropars and Kondaks (special hymns) of the Divine Liturgy, teach about Christ's victory over death and His destruction of Hades. Pascha is the greatest Feast of the Church year; Sunday is the greatest day of the week. We must always try to keep this as the Lord's Day, attending Divine Liturgy and receiving Communion.

#### **Monday - the Angels**

On Monday, the Church asks us to remember the Bodiless Powers who serve God. We know many stories from Holy Scripture that tell us how angels give us important messages and protect us.

#### **Tuesday - the Prophets, especially John the Baptist**

When we say the Creed, we say that we believe that before Christ came to live on earth, the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets. The prophets tried to keep the Israelites true to God. They often *prophesized* the coming of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was the last of the prophets. Even though we read about his life in the New Testament, he is an Old Testament prophet because he died before the Resurrection.

#### **Wednesday - Judas' betrayal of Christ; a day of repentance and fasting**

Wednesday is the day that Judas betrayed Jesus to the chief priests for thirty pieces of silver. Because this makes us remember the times we choose something above Christ, we fast as a sign of *repentance*.

#### **Thursday - the Apostles, Church Fathers, and great Bishops, especially St. Nicholas**

When the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles at Pentecost, the Holy Orthodox Church began. As the Church grew, the Apostles chose men to be bishops. Those men eventually chose others, and so on. All bishops of the Holy Orthodox Church today follow a line right back to the Apostles who lived with Jesus Christ. That's why we are "one holy, catholic, and Apostolic Church." We especially remember St. Nicholas, because he was a great Bishop who fought to keep the true teachings of the Church. We should always pray for our Bishops

to have the strength of their spiritual forefathers to lead the Church wisely. Do you know the names of your Bishops?

**Friday - *Christ's suffering and crucifixion; a day of repentance and fasting***

Friday is the day that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was crucified. Even as He suffered on the Cross, He showed His great love for man. For this reason we fast on Friday.

**Saturday - *the Theotokos, and all the Saints; Memorial Saturdays when we remember the those 'fallen asleep in the Lord' – the departed.***

Do you remember why we pray to the Theotokos and the saints? Saturday is when we also remember those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. What do you think that means – 'fall asleep in the Lord'?