

Understanding the Agpeya

Objective

To learn about the Agpeya and how we should use it in prayer

References

- ❖ http://www.agpeya.org/What_is_the_Agpeya/what_is_the_agpeya.html
- ❖ 12 Grade Sunday School Curriculum (Diocese of the Southern USA)

Scriptural Verse

"Seven times a day I praise You because of Your righteous judgments" (Psalms 119:164)

Lesson Outline

What is it?

The word, Agpeya, is a Coptic (ancient Egyptian) word meaning "Book of Hours." It is based on the Coptic root word, ti agp, which means "the hour."

It contains prayers for seven different hours to be said throughout the day (as stated in Psalm 119 above). The hours are chronologically laid out, each containing a theme corresponding to events in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When do we pray it?

The Agpeya is read throughout the day and in many situations. The hours of the day start from sunrise and end at sunset.

1. The First Hour: The morning prayer (Prime) is prayed upon waking up in the morning
2. The third hour (Terce): is prayed before the Offering of Incense during the Liturgy
3. The sixth hour (Sext): is prayed after the third hour in the Liturgy
4. The ninth hour (None): is also prayed during Liturgy on fasting days
5. The eleventh hour prayer (Vespers): is prayed in the early evening at sunset
6. The twelfth hour (Compline): is prayed before bedtime
7. The midnight hour: is prayed just before the Midnight Praises
8. The Veil hour: is prayed by priests, monks and bishops and all of those who wish to spend more time with God.

What's in it?

Each hour is composed of:

1. Introduction
 - a. The Lord's Prayer
 - b. The Prayer of Thanksgiving,
 - c. Psalm 50.
2. 12 Psalms (19 in the Prime Hour)
3. An excerpt from the Holy Gospel
4. Litanies.

5. Other prayers depending on the hour
 - a. Gloria (Prime)
 - b. Let us Praise with the angels (Morning)
 - c. Graciously Accord (Evening)
 - d. Trisagion
 - e. Hail to St. Mary
 - f. Introduction to the Creed
 - g. Creed
6. Lord Have Mercy is then chanted 41 times (representing the 39 lashes the Lord Jesus Christ received before the crucifixion, plus one for the spear in His side, plus one for the crown of thorns)
7. Holy, Holy, Holy
8. Absolution
9. Conclusion

What do the different hours represent?

- ❖ **Prime:** It symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ's incarnation, death and Resurrection. We pray it to give thanks to the Lord for having us rise from the sleep (like small death) and to grant us the power of His resurrection.
- ❖ **Terce:** Reminds us of three events:
 - The Lord Jesus Christ's trial by Pontius Pilate (Psalm 15:25: Isaiah 53:7)
 - His ascension into the heavens
 - "Lift up your gates, you princes, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in. Who is this king of glory? The Lord who is strong and mighty, the Lord who is mighty in war. Lift up your gates, you princes; and be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in. Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is this king of glory." (Psalm 23 in Coptic, 24 in Latin)
 - Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples at Pentecost.
 - "O Lord who sent down Your Holy Spirit upon Your holy disciples and Your honored apostles in the third hour, do not take Him away from us, O Good One, but we ask You to renew Him within us..."
- ❖ **Sext:** Commemorates the Passion of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❖ **None:** Commemorates the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.
- ❖ **Vespers:** Commemorates the taking down of the Lord Jesus Christ from the Cross.
- ❖ **Compline:** Commemorates the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Final Judgment.
- ❖ **Midnight Prayers:** They are arranged in accordance with the words of the psalmist, "I will rise late in the night to give thanks to You" (Psalm 119:62). Emphasizes being watchful and getting ready for the second coming of our Lord.
 - "Arise, you, O children of the light, to praise the Lord of Hosts, that He may grant us the salvation of our souls. When we stand in the flesh before You, take away from our minds the sleep of forgetfulness, grant us alertness"
 - "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the

wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, “Behold, the bridegroom is coming; arise and go out to meet him” (Matthew 25:1-13)

Why should we use it?

- ❖ Prolonged presence with the Lord
- ❖ Thanksgiving
- ❖ Thanksgiving Prayer
- ❖ Repentance and Humility
- ❖ Asking for mercy (Psalm 50)
- ❖ Glorification and Praise
- ❖ Glorifying the name of the Lord (Trisagion)
- ❖ Supplication
 - Prime First Absolution: “Therefore, we ask You, O our Master, the King of all ages, let Your face shine upon us, and the light of Your divine knowledge enlighten us. Grant us, O our Master, to be sons of light and sons of day, to pass this day in righteousness, chastity and good conduct, that we may complete all the rest of the days of our life without offense”
- ❖ Praying for mercy
 - 41 Lord have mercies
- ❖ According to God’s will
 - Graciously Accord: “Despise not, O Lord, the works of Your hands. You have been my refuge from generation to generation. I asked the Lord and said, “have mercy on me, heal my soul; for I have sinned against You”. Lord, I have fled unto You, save me, and teach me to do Your will, for You are my God, and with You is the fountain of life.”
- ❖ Being spiritually pre-occupied all day
- ❖ Comfort
 - “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress” (Psalm 4:1)

How should we pray it?

- ❖ Keep the goal in mind
- ❖ Remember God’s character as you pray
 - As you read the characteristics of God in the Agpeya, remember that He really is the person you are talking to
- ❖ Personalize the prayer
 - Don’t pray in generalities, but make it personal.
 - Remember God’s real mercy in your life
 - Thank Him for what He has actually done to you
 - Trust Him with your real issues
 - Confess your real sins
- ❖ Reading vs. Praying
 - Memorizing
 - Robotic prayer

- ❖ Personal prayer in addition to Agpeya
 - Agpeya gets you in the prayer mood
 - It is not a substitute for your personal prayers

Conclusion

The Agpeya prayers are tools that deepen our prayers and bring us closer to God. They are prayers that are full of thanksgiving, repentance, and praise. They model the perfect and most acceptable prayer before God.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. What hindrances do you experience that prevent you from praying with the Agpeya?
2. Discuss some of the psalms in the various hours with the class.