

EVENING PRAYERS: A REFLECTION

Outside, the summer day is unseasonably warm. Inside, it is cool and still. Outside, the sun is bright. Inside, it is dark, with few candles providing the only illumination. The scent of incense wafts out the doors to mix with the musky odor of the pine. You sit in silence. There are no greetings; there is no chatter. There is nothing to break the solitude as you prepare to worship.

Since our arrival at St. Augustine's, we have had our first experiences with Evensong. The Monday evening service gives us an opportunity to stop and take a breath for a few moments, enveloping ourselves in the candles, the incense, the music, and the reverence. As the brief service ends, we sit in prayerful repose and, in time, exit in silence, renewed and refreshed in faith.

This is Vespers, the ancient evening prayer of the Church, a time of contemplation, of reflection, of thanksgiving for the day just passed.

The various Offices sanctify all parts of the day and every aspect of our endeavors by reminding us of God's saving acts. Thanksgiving is the theme of this Office. Vespers is also a reminder of the evening sacrifice given by our Lord when he instituted the Holy Eucharist. For this reason, the Altar is incensed during the Magnificat, the Canticle of the Virgin Mary, Luke I:46-55, and the great thanksgiving song of the Church.

When a pot luck is offered following the service, the attitude of thanksgiving is extended for the fellowship of believers. To join with the small group of worshippers for a lively evening of discussion, argument, sharing of philosophy and experiences: how wonderful it is to be in the presence of intelligent people who respect all opinions and embrace all viewpoints.

We return to our daily lives, strengthened, replenished, ever thankful.

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