**Chapter 4, Section G: Symbolism of the Hours of the Divine Office**

The **Divine Office** revolves around the symbolic number **seven**, inspired by Psalm 118:164: “Seven times a day I have given you praise.” While originally a representation of unceasing prayer, early Christian monks, such as those influenced by **John Cassian**, interpreted this literally, organizing **seven daily prayer periods** to align with the scriptural call to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Each hour holds **symbolic meaning** tied to Scripture, the life of Christ, and early Christian traditions.

**Symbolism of Specific Hours**

1. **Lauds (Morning)**
   * Associated with dedicating the **day’s first thoughts and emotions** to God (Psalm 76:3).
   * Reflects the psalmist’s call to pray at daybreak: “In the morning I offer you my prayer” (Psalm 5:3).
2. **Terce (Midmorning)**
   * Commemorates the **descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost** (Acts 2:15).
3. **Sext (Midday)**
   * Symbolizes the **crucifixion of Christ** at noon.
   * Recounts Saint Peter’s **vision of salvation for all nations** (Acts 10:9).
   * Saint Caesarius links it to the **three visitors to Abraham** (Genesis 18), viewed as symbolic of the Trinity.
4. **None (Mid-Afternoon)**
   * Commemorates Christ’s **descent into Sheol** to free the ancestors and break the gates of Hades.
   * Reflects Cornelius the Centurion’s vision at the ninth hour (Acts 10:1-3).
5. **Vespers (Evening)**
   * Reflects Old Testament imagery: “Let my prayer arise before you like incense” (Psalm 140:2).
   * Symbolizes the **Last Supper** and Christ’s raised hands on the cross, offering salvation.
6. **Compline (Night)**
   * Prayed for a **peaceful night and a happy death**.
   * Inspired by Paul and Silas’s prayer at midnight (Acts 16:25) and Psalm 118:64: “At midnight I will rise and thank you.”
7. **Vigils (Night Prayer)**
   * Encourages prayer even during the night, reflecting the call for ceaseless devotion.

**Role of Monastic Legislators**

* **Saint Basil the Great**: Emphasized using prayer hours to orient thoughts and emotions toward God, with specific psalms (e.g., Psalm 90 at Sext) to combat spiritual struggles like **acedia** (the “noonday devil”).
* **John Cassian**: Highlighted the sacred events tied to specific hours (e.g., crucifixion at Sext, liberation of souls at None). He advocated for **hermit life** as ideal for unceasing prayer.
* **Saint Caesarius of Arles**: Linked the hymns and prayers of each hour to their **symbolic meanings**, often emphasizing their connection to the **Blessed Trinity** and combating heresies like Arianism.

**Purpose of the Hours**

Each prayer hour is a reminder to **praise the Creator** and realign oneself to God throughout the day. The **fixed hours** serve as a framework for focusing on prayer and refreshment of the soul, helping monks and the faithful fulfill the call to ceaseless devotion.