

## A Description of Roman Catholic Prayer and East Coast Swing a.k.a. “Roman Swing”

### **Motivation**

A flourishing Christian life thrives on and absolutely requires a strong prayer life. Saint Paul the Apostle, in 1 Thessalonians 5, instructs us to “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.” Our Lord Himself, in Gethsemane, told the Apostles, “Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Despite the critical importance of prayer in the Christian life, many Catholics today live without a habit of daily prayer. Several factors contribute to this unfortunate situation: some people have never learned how to pray; others might lack good examples of Catholics who demonstrate a habit of prayer; still others might not have sufficient virtue to begin a habit of prayer without God’s encouragement through other members of the Body of Christ—fellow believers.

Specifically, Catholics would benefit from a greater amount of communal prayer. Our Lord tells us, “amen, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Together with our need for prayer, Christians also have a strong need for community life. Saint Paul exhorts, also in 1 Thessalonians 5, “therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, as indeed you do.” This encouragement does not only take the form of communal spoken prayer, but it should also permeate our celebrations and social gatherings, committing them to the Kingdom of God. As an example of a celebration that Jesus Christ sanctified with His presence, our Lord began His public ministry by changing the water into wine at the wedding at Cana. May Jesus Christ always enrich our celebrations with His grace and His presence.

Unfortunately, instead of the laity conducting an ever-increasing portion of its

social life within The Church, the social lives of Catholics have become more secularized, with greater attendance at concerts, bars, and other places that do not embrace godliness in any way. Meanwhile, the role of The Church in the social life of the laity has decreased. We need to find ways to come together socially that build up God's Kingdom, rather than living our community lives entirely in the world.

### **Merits of the Divine Office as a Solution**

God's people, especially the clergy, have benefited from the Divine Office and praying of the Psalms for thousands of years. No form of worship, except for the Holy Mass, has a richer or more profound history. Nevertheless, lay people today, on average, have very little familiarity with the Divine Office. Increasing awareness and practice of the Divine Office among Catholics can help unsheath this great weapon that God has given us through His Church.

Gathering to pray the Divine Office together bears fruit in several ways. (1) as quoted above, our Lord told us that when two believers pray in agreement, God the Father will grant their prayer. Praying together as a community results in many graces from God. (2) some attendees, perhaps, have never heard about the Divine Office or have never known anything about it. Praying the Divine Office together might introduce them to this powerful and beautiful form of worshiping God. (3) attendees who are already familiar with the Divine Office may have never learned how to pray it. Witnessing the Divine Office prayed as a community might empower them to begin praying it on their own. (4) both preceding and following the social part of the evening with prayer will sanctify the social part of the evening, helping it to glorify God and lift our hearts up to the Lord.

### **Merits of East Coast Swing Dancing as a Solution**

A group seeking to incorporate prayer with a social activity could validly choose from many different activities. However, Holy Scripture specifically mentions dancing as a means of praising God. Psalm 149:3 declares, "let them praise his name in dance, make music with tambourine and lyre." Other social activities, such as movie nights, playing card games, or attending sporting events do not hold this distinction.

East Coast Swing Dancing provides several important benefits. (1) by using and

improving the skill of dancing in tandem with God's gift of music—particularly when pairing the dancing with prayer—participants can, as the Psalmist says, “praise his name in dance.” (2) East Coast Swing Dancing encourages fellowship and friendship. By providing a structure for people to ask each other to dance, swing dancing facilitates easily introducing oneself to new fellow Catholics, which can allow attendees to find a community of support in The Faith. Likewise, while standing beside the dance floor waiting to dance, attendees can naturally strike up conversations with their own sex, fostering communities of brotherhood and sisterhood as well. Such introductions might not happen as easily at events where a person stays in a particular place or seat. (3) East Coast Swing Dancing provides a healthy environment for single Catholics to meet other single Catholics. Historically, church communities have played an important role in young couples meeting, but increasingly, single Catholics turn to secular places to meet new people. A healthy environment for single Catholics to meet each other, especially one based in prayer, could help combat the marriage crisis and could lead to more Catholic families on fire with love for our Lord. (4) East Coast Swing Dancing, in particular, lends itself to chaste social dancing. East Coast Swing is the “ballroom competition” swing dance, and among all forms of swing dancing (e.g., Lindy Hop, Charleston, West Coast, Balboa, Modern, etc.) East Coast Swing is the most structured and professional. East Coast Swing does not incorporate sensual moves or close embraces, instead focusing on footwork, timing, and teamwork between the leader and the follower. (5) East Coast Swing Dancing is great exercise. We live in an evermore virtualized world, where more and more people struggle to stay active and live their lives in the real world. Through East Coast Swing Dancing, people can gain a new healthy activity that connects them with other human beings in the real world, leading to a better mental and physical state of being.

Together with prayer beforehand and afterward, East Coast Swing Dancing can help contribute to a great community of Catholics, who, as Saint Paul exhorts us, “encourage one another and build one another up.”

### **Monthly Event Format**

To address the goals outlined above, Roman Swing monthly events have adopted the following format:

- 6:30-6:45 PM: In sanctuary, recite the Liturgy of the Hours Evening Prayer together.
- 6:45-7:15 PM: In the parish hall, offer East Coast Swing Dance beginner's lesson.
- 7:15-8:50 PM: East Coast Swing social dancing with light refreshments.
- 8:50-9:00 PM: Returning to sanctuary, close with Liturgy of the Hours Night Prayer.

## **Conclusion**

Please join us for our next gathering of Roman Swing! Event details can be found on our website, [romanswing.com](http://romanswing.com). Through prayer, community, and social dancing, we can give glory to God and build up His kingdom. May the peace of Christ be with you always!