

What is the Divine Office?

The Divine Office (or the Liturgy of the Hours) is the public, daily prayer of the Church. Together with the Mass and other liturgical rites, they form the official prayer of the Church. The prayer comes mainly from Sacred Scripture, using the Psalms, OT & NT Canticles, Gospel Canticles.

Why pray the Divine Office?

In Lk 18:1, Jesus commands us to “*pray continually and never lose heart*”. The Divine Office is the Church’s response of praying unceasingly throughout the day. Thus, the first thing, that we have to understand about the Divine Office is that it is not private or individual prayer.

When we pray the Divine Office:

- **We are praying together as a Church, as Christ’s body.**
We are praying this one same prayer together with all the other members of the Church around the world,
- **We participate in the prayer of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body.**
In the Divine Office, we unite ourselves with Christ in His prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Father.
- **We participate in Christ’s prayer for the salvation of all of mankind.**
We are praying not just for ourselves and our day, but for all the needs of the whole world.

Who prays the Divine Office?

As the Divine Office is the official prayer of the Church, **all** who are part of the Church are able to, and in fact are encouraged to pray the Divine Office.

The ordained clergy (Bishops, Priests and Deacons) together with the religious have received the mandate from the Church to celebrate the Divine Office. It is through them that the prayer of Christ may persevere unceasingly in the Church.

Although it is the duty of the clergy and religious to pray the Divine Office, the laity, too, are encouraged to recite the divine office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually.

When to pray the Divine Office?

The Divine Office is known as the Liturgy of the Hours because it sanctifies the hours of the day. In this way we are offering up the day to God, just like the Apostles were doing as we read of them in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 3:1, 10:3, 10:9, 16:25)

Prayer	Latin Name	Time (<i>Approx.</i>)
Morning	Lauds	6.00am
Before Noon	Terce	9.00am
Midday	Sext	12.00 noon
Afternoon	None	3.00pm
Evening	Vespers	6.00pm
Night	Compline	Before Sleep
Office of Readings	Matins	

Morning and Evening Prayer are the two hinges on which the Liturgy of the Hours turns. If possible, they should be prayed in common.

Morning Prayer (Lauds)

This hour is prayed at sunrise or in the early morning. The whole Church together **praises** the Creator and his mighty works every morning, and offers up the day ahead. It contains an Old Testament Canticle and the Benedictus, which is the Canticle of Zechariah. This highlights the expectant nature of the prayer which reflects our anticipation of Christ in the world in the day.

Prayer during the Day (Terce, Sext, None)

The names Terce, Sext and None mean third, sixth and ninth hour. As the roman day starts at 6am, this translates to 9am, noon and 3pm. It is suggested that one of these hours, that which is most convenient for the individual, be prayed, to keep the Lord in mind throughout the day.

Evening Prayer (Vespers)

This hour is prayed at sunset or early evening. In this hour, the whole Church **gives thanks** to God for His wonderful work of salvation in the world that day. It contains a New Testament Canticle and the Magnificat, which is Mary’s song of praise. This highlights our giving praise for the experience of the Incarnation of Christ in the world in the day.

Night Prayer (Compline)

This is the “bedtime” hour of the Church’s daily prayer and is ordinarily prayed just before retiring. It is the last prayer of the day, and sums up all that happened, as we examine our consciences and offer the actions of the day to God.

Office of Readings (Matins)

This is the only hour which does not have a designated time. It is a meditative hour of reflection on Scripture and the writings of the great spiritual authors of the Church.

Why do we pray the Psalms?

The psalms contain in them a rich expression of the people’s faith in God. In them we find psalms of thanksgiving, praise and petition. The psalmist express their deepest trust, repentance and sorrow, together with the greatness of God and his Love through the psalms.

From the scriptures we know that Jesus, the Apostles and the early Christian community prayed the psalms and regularly quoted from them. It is that tradition that has carried on in the Church, forming the basis of the Divine Office.

What if I cannot relate to the psalms?

There will be days when the psalms you pray might be expressing an emotion different from what you are experiencing. Such as sorrow, when you are feeling happy. As such, it can be quite difficult to relate to the prayer. For this we have to keep in mind that we are praying as a Church. As we pray, we are offering up the prayer of someone else who might be in great pain and sorrow, or someone who might be giving praise to God.

Can I make up an Hour I missed?

In the Divine Office, each prayer is linked to the different hours of the day, the prayer you should pray should be of that particular time. If you have missed an earlier prayer, there is no need to “make up” for it later. The Divine Office is not a quota of prayer that we have to accomplish within a day.

Structure of the Divine Office

Morning	Evening	Night
Introduction		
Invitatory Psalm		Examination of Conscience
Hymn		
Psalm	Psalm	1 or 2 Psalms
OT Canticle	Psalm	
Psalm	NT Canticle	
Scripture Reading		
Short Responsory		
Gospel Canticle <i>Benedictus</i>	Gospel Canticle <i>Magnificat</i>	Gospel Canticle <i>Nunc Dimittis</i>
Intecessions		
The Lord's Prayer		
Concluding Prayer		
Blessing		

Introduction

The first hour of the day begins with the Invitatory.

V: Lord, open our lips. (*Sign of the Cross on the mouth*)

R: And we shall praise your name.

Followed by the Invitatory Psalm with its antiphon.

Subsequent hours begin as follows

V: O God, come to our aid. (*Normal Sign of the Cross*)

R: O Lord, make haste to help us.

V: Glory be to the Father...

R: As it was in the beginning...

Recitation of psalms/canticles

The recitation of each psalm/canticle is as follows:

Antiphon → Psalm/Canticle → Glory be... → Antiphon.

Gospel Canticle

The Sign of the Cross is made at the beginning of the Gospel Canticles (*Benedictus, Magnificat, Nunc Dimittis*)

Posture

Introduction and Hymn ~ Stand

Psalmody, Reading, Short Responsory ~ Sit

Gospel Canticle until the end ~ Stand

Getting Started on the Divine Office

1. Get a Prayer Book (*at Catholic Bookshops*)

While the Divine Office properly comes in a three volume set, beginners can purchase the smaller *Shorter Morning and Evening Prayer*, or the *single volume version* which includes the feast days and mid-day prayers.

2. Get an Ordo (*at Catholic Bookshops*)

The psalms in the Divine Office are divided into a four-week cycle. The Ordo will indicate the week and also the seasons, feast days and solemnities.

3. Familiarize yourself with the prayer book

Know where the different sections for the psalter, proper of seasons, night prayer, etc...

4. Find a teacher or companion

The best way to learn is to start praying it with someone who has been praying the Divine Office, and would be able to guide you through it.

5. Make time to pray it

Start slowly. Do not rush into praying all seven hours. Start with the Morning and Evening prayer, and slowly progress with the night and prayers during the day.

6. "Why" more important than "How"

When you first start it is better to not worry about "praying it right" as to really enter into the mystery of praying liturgically. While the rubrics of the liturgy are important, the more important part is getting into the spirit of the prayer.

- It is about praying as and with the whole Church.
- It is about praying for the world.
- It is about offering up the day to God.

7. Find out more

You can find more information and even online versions of the Divine Office at the following websites.

<http://www.universalis.com>

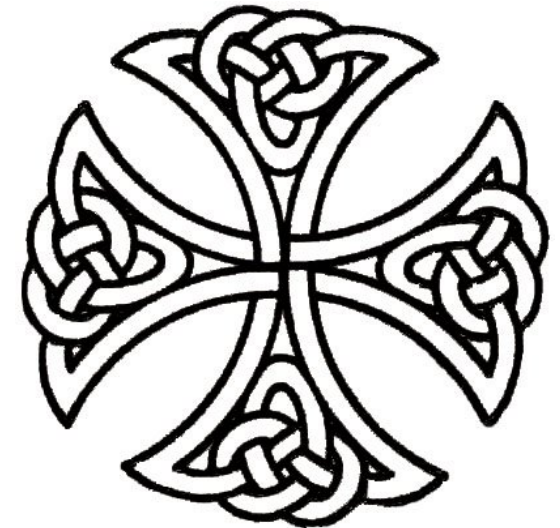
<http://prayer.rosaryshop.com/discoveringPrayer.pdf>

http://www.liturgyofthehours.org/liturgy_hours.htm

<http://www.chastitysf.com/loh.htm>

<http://www.fdlc.org/liturgy.htm>

B e g i n n e r s G u i d e



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