

Opus Dei: The Divine Office

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 churches were closed, like many places, in part of the lockdown response to stop the spread of the virus. Priests, over livestreams from empty churches, encouraged the faithful to find other ways to experience presence with God in the absence of the Eucharist. One of the recommendations was praying the Liturgy of the Hours.

The [Liturgy of the Hours](#)⁰¹, also called the [Divine Office](#)³⁸, the Breviary, or sometimes *Opus Dei*⁰² (Work of God) is the most important liturgy celebrated by the Roman Church, second only to the Liturgy of the Eucharist: the [Mass](#)⁰³. Although lay usage of this liturgy has fallen away in modern times, clergy and members of religious communities are bound to celebrate it daily. Monks and Nuns attached to Monasteries pray seven times a day and once at night in accordance with [Psalm118\(119\) verse 164](#)⁰⁴. While clergy are generally bound to pray 3 to 5 of the hours each day.

It was once the practice in many parishes to publicly celebrate Sunday Vespers (Evening Prayer) but as the laity has lost touch with this liturgy, public recitation has mostly been discontinued. However, in recent years, and with the unwelcomed help of the response to COVID, this practice is making a comeback. Churches like [St. John Cantius in Chicago](#)⁰⁵ are celebrating often and streaming their services on YouTube. The Vatican offers the hours as a podcast “[Liturgia Horarum](#)⁰⁶” in Latin. Monasteries as well have started to stream their services in podcast form (Notably: [Abbaye du Barroux](#)⁰⁷ and the [Abbey of Notre-Dame de Fidélité of Jouques](#)⁰⁸). Several mobile apps have also gained followers: [iBreviary](#)⁰⁹, [Universalis](#)¹⁰, [Divinium Officium](#)¹¹, and [DivineOffice](#)¹².

There is an abundance of history (and [variation](#)¹³) to the Divine Office. The Catechism (CCC1174) encourages the laity to harmonize their prayers with those of the whole church. It is one thing to recite popular (yet meaningful) prayers and devotions throughout the day, but participating in the office includes one’s personal prayers with those of the wider community across the world. It can make the experience very uplifting because the effort of one is counted within a common treasure being offered to God by people continuously across the globe. As the world turns and day turns to night, at any given moment someone somewhere is praying one of the 8 hours: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline.

Breviaries have been in production for hundreds of years and remain so to this day. Below is an incomplete list of currently "in-print" offerings available online. Unfortunately, due to relatively low demand, compared to the Bible, Missal, or secular publications, the full set of books are expensive (\$150-\$500). But for laity, who practically will only pray a subset of the hours, more affordable abbreviated books are available. Apps are also free or reasonably priced.

Per [Summorum Pontificum](#)¹⁴ published in 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI, Catholics have two official forms of liturgy available right now for both the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours (LOTH):

1. Ordinary Form

1. [\(official\) Latin: Liturgia Horarum](#)¹⁵
2. [\(vernacular\) English: Liturgy of the Hours](#)¹⁶

1. And abbreviated variations:

1. [Christian Prayer](#)¹⁷
 2. [Christian Prayer \(International\)](#)¹⁸
 3. [From England](#)¹⁹ - People seem to agree this translation is more satisfying than the US English.
 4. [Shorter Christian Prayer](#)²⁰
 5. [Compline](#)²¹ (Night Prayer in Latin and English)
 6. [Mundelein Psalter](#)²² (Morning, Evening, and Night Prayer with noted for chanting/singing the office)
3. [iBreviary](#)⁰⁹, [DivineOffice](#)¹², [Universalis](#)¹⁰ are apps oriented towards this form. DivineOffice also shows a live map of the world with indications of other users currently praying.
2. Extraordinary Form
1. [Latin Only \(As 2 volumes\)](#)²³
 2. [Latin+English \(As 3 volumes\)](#)²⁴
 3. [Latin Daytime Hours Only](#)²⁵
 4. [English+Latin \(Prime and Compline, Sunday Vespers\)](#)²⁶
 5. [iBreviary](#)⁰⁹ has an option called “Vetus Ordo” for the EF office. While, [Divinium Officium](#)¹¹, is an excellent website with many versions and options for the EF office.

Additionally, religious orders have their own variations, though many have aligned with one of the two above in some format. One such variation is the [Monastic Diurnal](#)²⁷ ([US source](#)²⁸) ([French](#)²⁹). Variation is a misleading word as this is a very historically based arrangement of the office with its basis in the original setting by St. Benedict of Norcia some 1500 years ago. It is more of a source than a variation. This book only offers the day hours while [Matins](#)³⁰ is a separate volume. The monastic office differs from the Roman office in that it has a weekly cycle of all 150 psalms. The Roman office covers the Psalms over 4 weeks. An excellent [guide](#)³¹ to this office is made available by an oblate of a Benedictine Monastery.

Another historical office is the [Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary](#)³². This *breviaria parvum* (small breviary) has been used by laity and religious communities for hundreds of years and is a great devotion to our blessed Mother.

With such a long history, the Divine Office has taken on many forms and offerings over the years. Although, the structure has generally remained similar. There are currently many options available to Catholics. A [next release](#)³³ of the [English LOTH](#)³⁴ expected in a few years will include an updated translation of the [Psalms](#)³⁵, official English translations for the Hymns, and realignment with the Liturgia Horarum originally published in the 1970s after the second Vatican Council. With the current revival of traditional elements throughout the United States, the USCCB may encourage commercial publications of this next version to include more Latin alongside the English to reenforce and educate the laity about the historical, liturgical, and universal nature of this lasting liturgical offering.

Brief: How-To Pray The Divine Office

This page provides a very concise description of how to approach praying the Liturgy of the Hours. These concepts should generally translate to any breviary and allow the reader to have a starting point for further investigations.

To begin with, it is best to not be discouraged if your first few attempts at praying the office seem more like an exercise in turning pages and searching (if praying from a book) or praying from a screen with no clue of structure to your prayer (if praying from an app). Rest assured there is structure and you will come to see it after a while. All hours more or less are composed of the same elements of prayer, they just differ in order and number. The elements are: opening prayers (*O God come to my assistance + Glory Be*), hymn, short reading, responses and versicles, chapter reading/lesson, closing prayers (*Lord have mercy, Our Father, Let us bless the Lord, ...*), collect, antiphons, and of course the Psalms. Also included in some of the hours are the Benedictus (Lauds), the Magnificat (Vespers), and confitior/examination of conscience (Compline).

The daily offices are ordered according to liturgical seasons, so a liturgical calendar ([E.F.](#)³⁶/[O.F.](#)³⁷) is necessary. Within the calendar are seasons: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time. Throughout the year, days where commemoration to a Saint is observed, the approach to each hour differs and can become complicated for those new to the prayer.

Start with Compline as it has the least amount of variation. In the Benedictine Office, it is the same every night. In the Ordinary and Extraordinary Form, Sunday Compline is very similar to the Benedictine Compline. The other days repeat each week. Compline is the best starting point not only because of its straightforward execution but also because its practice with prepare you for the habit of prayer at the end of the day and allow you to reflect on how well you attempted to live a life of virtue throughout the day.

Once Compline is enough understood the reader is advised to take on morning prayer: either Lauds/Morning Prayer or Prime (E.F. only). The practice of this hour will allow you to dedicate your actions for the rest of the day in a purposeful way. These hours are more complex and you will start to align with the Liturgical calendar. It is advised to first look in the “Common of the Saints”, if there is a commemoration, then to follow the instructions given there. Otherwise the “Psalter” is used with possible substitution of elements of the hour from the “Common of the Seasons”.

Using a print breviary, it will take some time to master the variations of daily prayer. Following along with the Podcasts and live streams can help. Apps remove the complexity and you just read through the prayer as it is presented. This may also be a good way to become familiar with the hours.

Whichever version of the hours and whichever medium you chose, remember these two things: 1) Your mood will not always relate to the day’s prayers so offer the prays for those whom they may pertain. 2) Even when you cannot find the words to pray for yourself, the office provides you words so even in times of dryness, you can still offer sincere prayers to God.

Links:

- 01 <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgy-of-the-hours>
- 02 <https://christdesert.org/prayer/opus-dei/>
- 03 <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass>
- 04 <http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drl&bk=21&ch=118&l=164-#x>
- 05 https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7gYdjfejL2Im_k2dPZYkA
- 06 <https://www.vaticannews.va/la/podcast/liturgia-horarum.html>
- 07 <https://barroux.org/en/liturgie/listen-to-our-offices.html>
- 08 <https://neumz.com/>
- 09 <http://www.ibreviary.com/m/>
- 10 <https://www.universalis.com/L/0>
- 11 <https://divinumofficium.com/>
- 12 <https://divineoffice.org/>
- 13 <https://stbernardabbey.com/the-divine-office/>
- 14 http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20070707_summorum-pontificum.html
- 15 https://www.theologicalforum.org/Category/105/Product/420/Liturgia_Horarum_Hardcover_Edition_
- 16 <https://www.christianbook.com/liturgy-of-the-hours-large-print/9780899427102/pd/427100?event=ESRCN%7CM>
- 17 <https://catholicbookpublishing.com/product/1088>
- 18 https://www.amazon.com/Christian-Prayer-Readings-Selection-Ecumenical/dp/9715903576/ref=rtpb_14?_encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=9715903576&pd_rd_r=d83e49f5-d3d7-463f-91c8-55ab16139e35&pd_rd_w=ZzbsJ&pd_rd_wg=9ld4C&pf_rd_p=1060fc32-cc06-48f1-987d-6b74a57cd8f2&pf_rd_r=CYFXPM82YR05FWZDGC2A&psc=1&refRID=CYFXPM82YR05FWZDGC2A
- 19 <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/RiteOffice.shtml>
- 20 <https://catholicbookpublishing.com/product/1089>
- 21 <https://www.ignatius.com/The-Office-of-Compline-P1852.aspx>
- 22 <https://www.liturgicalinstitute.org/mundelein-psalter>
- 23 <http://www.breviariumromanum.com/inside.html>
- 24 <https://www.baroniuspress.com/book.php?wid=56&bid=59#tab=tab-1>
- 25 <https://boutique.barroux.org/liturgie-romaine/1663-diurnale-romanum-9782000004950.html>
- 26 <https://angeluspress.org/products/divine-office>
- 27 http://www.theabbeyshop.com/product_info.php?cPath=21_90&products_id=745
- 28 <https://clearcreekmonks.org/gift-shop/monastic-diurnal-liturgical-book/>
- 29 <https://boutique.barroux.org/1383-liturgie-monastique>
- 30 <https://clearcreekmonks.org/gift-shop/office-of-matins/>
- 31 <https://saintsshallarise.blogspot.com/>
- 32 <https://www.baroniuspress.com/book.php?wid=56&bid=47>
- 33 <https://tomsdigest.wordpress.com/2019/08/26/revised-liturgy-of-the-hours-what-do-we-know/>
- 34 <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgy-of-the-hours/liturgy-of-the-hours-second-edition>
- 35 http://www.giamusic.com/sacred_music/RGP/psalmDisplay.cfm?psalm_id=352
- 36 <https://propria.org/ordo-2021/ordo-2020>
- 37 <https://www.usccb.org/resources/2021-liturgical-calendar>
- 38 <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/divine-office>