

PRAYING THE DAILY OFFICE

"Seven times a day I praise you" – Psalm 119:164

The Daily Office

This is an ancient practice that uses daily prayers to mark the times of the day. For Anglicans, this generally comes in the form of the two main offices of Daily Morning Prayer and Daily Evening Prayer. They should be led by lay people and are said communally or individually. Other offices as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) include Noonday Prayer and Compline (an office said before going to sleep).

History

From ancient times worship has been not just a weekly but a daily affair. For devout Jews, daily prayer rested upon the divine command:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." -Deut. 6:4-7

This was taken to mean that the Shema was to be said twice daily – upon waking and upon going to sleep. There's also evidence that the Temple sacrifices took place twice a day: once in the morning and once in the evening. Those unable to attend the Temple liturgies began to pray at the same "hours."

As monastic communities developed, they formed their entire lives upon the rhythm of daily prayer. They consisted of prayers, a psalm, appointed Bible readings, canticles, and the Lord's Prayer. Eventually seven offices developed: Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. St. Benedict's Rule (ca. 540) establishes common pattern: Nocturns and Lauds (middle of night), Prime (6:00), Terce (9:00), Sext (12:00), Nones (3:00), Vespers (sunset) and Compline (before bed).

Each office included Psalms, Scripture Reading, Verses and Responses, and Set Prayers. Entire Psalter read each week. Pious Christians sometimes attended, but the Daily Office was associated mainly with monks, later required of all clergy (from 802). Sunday Vespers was celebrated in most parish churches.

Over time, the offices became increasingly complicated. This increased complexity, combined with the abandonment of the vernacular tongue in public prayer, made it exceedingly difficult for ordinary men and women to participate in the daily prayer of the Church.

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One of the beneficial effects of the English Reformation was that Thomas Cranmer, the author of the first Book of Common Prayer made a deliberate effort to simplify the Daily Offices so that both clergy and laity could participate in it. The number of offices was reduced from seven to two. Morning Prayer was based upon the Medieval office of Matins together with elements from Prime. Evening Prayer was, in its essence, a combination of Vespers and Compline. The Office as a whole was revised around the importance of regular recitation of the Psalms and reading through the whole Bible. This gives the Anglican Office its distinctive character.

“There was never any thing by the wit of man so well devised, or so sure established, which in continuance of time hath not been corrupted: As, among other things, it may plainly appear by the Common Prayers in the Church, commonly called Divine Service. The first original and ground whereof if a man would search out by the ancient Fathers, he shall find, that the same was not ordained but of a good purpose, and for a great advancement of godliness. For they so ordered the matter, that all the whole Bible (or the greatest part thereof) should be read over every year; intending thereby, that the Clergy, and especially such as were Ministers in the congregation, should (by often reading, and meditation in God’s word) be stirred up to godliness themselves and be more able to exhort others by wholesome Doctrine, and to confute them that were adversaries to the Truth; and further, that the people (by daily hearing of holy Scripture read in the Church) might continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true Religion.”

-From the Preface to the 1549 Book of Common Prayer

The 1979 BCP restored Sext (Noonday Prayer) and Compline as optional offices. The BCP also has a shortened version of the four “hours” called “Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families.” They are titled In the Morning, At Noon, In the Early Evening, and At the Close of Day.

The Purpose of the Daily Office: The sanctification of time – a reminder that all time is sacred since all time belongs to God and the sanctification of the individual – a way to draw a person closer to God.

“The idea of some set form of Office...is based on a realistic assessment of human beings and of our prayer potential. We do not always pray with spontaneity and ease, nor should our prayer depend on the way we feel. Prayer which is so based on feelings is unstable and lacks depth. The Office is a form of prayer which is independent of our feelings, though, of course it is often accompanied by, and arouses, deep feelings and emotion.” Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer*, p. 187-188

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How to Pray the Daily Office

Some Tips for Saying the Office

- Mark pages before beginning to avoid losing concentration
- Appropriate to have others read the lessons
- Begin and end with at least 30 seconds of silence: use to focus thoughts on praise of God
- Speak office aloud in a reverent but not overly slow way.
- Develop your own system of prayer positions (i.e. will you stand for Canticles, Kneel for Prayer, etc.)
- Try not to worry too much about the meanings of obscure passages (You can take notes to ask questions later)
- Stick to the text: don't add in lists of intercessions or extemporary praises. These are important but are best kept separate
- Stick with your Office Book: don't change systems of prayer, but stick with one until it becomes "second nature" to you.

Morning Prayer (p. 37-60)

1. Opening Sentence: Choose 1 from those listed, special sentences provided for seasons (optional)
2. Confession and Absolution: Generally omitted in private worship
3. The Invitatory (p.42)
4. Opening Canticle: Venite or Jubilate in ordinary time, Christ Our Passover in Easter Week. Full version of Psalm 95 (p. 724) used in Lent
5. Psalms. Use assigned Psalms from Daily Office Lectionary (p. 936-1001). Daily Office Lectionary Year One is used in odd numbered calendar years; Year Two is for even numbered calendar years. The First set of Psalms assigned for each day are said at Morning Prayer. Special Psalms and Lessons are provided for Holy Days. Each Psalm is followed by the Gloria Patri (p.46).
6. First Lesson: Old Testament Lesson from Daily Office Lectionary.
7. Old Testament Canticle: Choose one or use the Canticle assigned to the day of the week on p. 144.
8. Second Lesson: Epistle Lesson from Daily Office Lectionary.
9. New Testament Canticle: Choose one or use the Canticle assigned to the day of the week on p. 144.
10. Apostles Creed (p.53)
11. The Prayers: (p.54). Use either Suffrages A or B
12. The Collect of the Day: Use the Collect for the Week (p. 155-185) or of the Day on Holy Days (185-194) (optional)
13. Collect: Choose one from those provided on p. 56-57. Note special collects for some days of week (Friday-Sunday)
14. Collect for Mission: Use one of three collects on p. 57-58.
15. General Thanksgiving and/or Prayer of Chrysostom (optional)
16. Let us Bless the Lord (p. 59)
17. Grace or other Closing Sentence (p. 59-60) (optional)

Evening Prayer (p. 61-73)

Procedure is the same as above Except:

1. Opening Canticle is always Phos Hilarion (p. 64)
2. Lesson: One to three lessons may be used; often it's just the gospel.
3. Canticle: Magnificat (p. 65) or Nunc Dimittis (p. 66)

Morning Prayer is prayed publicly at Trinity Cathedral on Tues-Thurs, from 9-9:30am in the Columbarium (adjacent to the narthex in the Cathedral proper).