

A Beginner's Guide to Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours is the public and communal prayer of the Catholic Church. It is considered to be one of the first duties of the Bride of Christ.

The Catholic Church teaches us that the Liturgy of the Hours is *like an extension of the Eucharistic Celebration* (CCC, 1178), *accomplishes our sanctification* (GILH, 14), *permeates and transfigures the time of each day* (CCC, 1174), *reaches all of humanity and contributes greatly to the salvation of the world* (GILH, 27), and *unites our praise to that of Christ and all His angels and saints in heaven* (GILH, 15-16).

In the year 2000, in his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Inuente*, Pope St John Paul II said it was time for the Church to “put out into the deep.” He expressed his concern for Christians who had become content with a shallow prayer that was unable to fill their whole life. He said that in today’s world, such Christians would be “Christians at risk.”

He then insisted that the Church “become distinguished in the art of prayer” and that greater pastoral care be devoted to “promoting the Liturgy of the Hours as the prayer of the whole people of God.”

May this guide serve as an aid to help you become distinguished in the art of praying the Liturgy of the Hours, the prayer that is able to fill your whole life and plunge you into the deep of God’s strong and enduring love!

While there are other approved versions of what is traditionally called the Divine Office, the Liturgy of the Hours is the most commonly known and practiced throughout the Roman Catholic Church. You can find the complete Liturgy of the Hours in a 4-volume set. However, this guide is for the single volume *Christian Prayer* book which contains *Morning*, *Evening*, and *Night Prayer*. It also includes an abbreviated section for *Office of Readings* and *Daytime Prayer*.

Christian Prayer is a great start for laypeople who desire to begin praying the Liturgy of the Hours.

Let's begin our walk-through...

Before you do anything, you will first want to place a bookmark in what is called the *Ordinary* found on page 686. **The *Ordinary* includes basic instructions for praying the various hours throughout the day.**



In the *Ordinary* you will find that some words are in black while others are in red. **The words printed in red are instructions. The words printed in black are the prayers that you actually pray.** It is a good idea to spend some time in the *Ordinary* to become familiar with these basic instructions.

It is also important to note that the *Ordinary* has prayers that are repeated each day such as the *Invitatory*, the *Canticle of Zechariah* and the *Canticle of Mary*. These prayers are said prior to *Morning Prayer*, during *Morning Prayer*, and during *Evening Prayer* respectively.

Now on to the ribbons...

You will want to place your first ribbon towards the front of *Christian Prayer* in a section called the *Proper of Seasons*. This section begins on page 41 and contains all the prayers according to the “seasons” of the Church: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time. Find the page that corresponds to the current week of the Liturgical Year and place this ribbon there.

In this section there are special *antiphons* and prayers for the hours prayed on Sundays throughout the year. During the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter there are specific readings and prayers for each day.



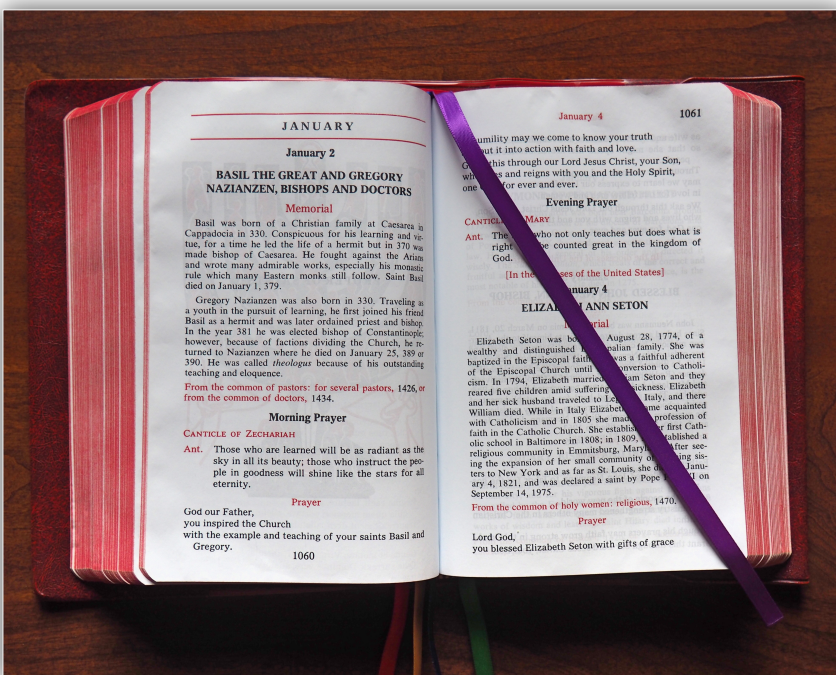
Place the second ribbon in the middle of the prayer book in the *Psalter* that corresponds to the current week in the Liturgical year. The four-week Psalter begins with Week 1 (Sunday Evening Prayer I) on page 701. If you ever wonder which Psalms we are currently using (there are four weeks of Psalms), you can find that under the heading for each week of the Liturgical Calendar in the *Proper of Seasons*.



Set your third ribbon to the current day for *Night Prayer*. *Night Prayer* is a great way to start praying the Liturgy of the Hours, because it is only a one-week cycle (versus the four-week cycle of Psalms for *Morning* and *Evening Prayer*). The first day for *Night Prayer* can be found on page 1034 (to be prayed on Sunday Vigils and on Solemnities). This is also where you can find basic instructions for praying *Night Prayer*. You can use this ribbon for praying *Daytime Prayer* as well (beginning on page 994).



Your fourth ribbon should be placed in the section entitled *Proper of Saints* beginning on page 1060. The *Proper of Saints* contains special prayers and *antiphons* for memorials and feast days throughout the calendar year. For this section all you need to know is the calendar date to know where to put the ribbon.



Lastly, place your fifth ribbon in the section titled *Commons*. These are specific Psalms, readings, and prayers that can be used on memorials and feast days. In the *Proper of Saints* you will find the *Commons* along with their page numbers that can be used for particular memorials and feast days.



Congratulations! Now that you have all of ribbons in place, let's go over some basic instructions for praying *Morning* and *Evening Prayer*...

Some Basic Instructions

First, *Morning* and *Evening Prayer* always begin with

† *God, come to my assistance.*

Lord, make haste to help me.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever.

Amen. Alleluia

This ought to be followed by a hymn. The *Christian Prayer* book contains a wonderful guide for hymns beginning on page 1502.

After the hymn, *Antiphon 1* is said followed by the Psalm. At the end of the Psalm, you will always pray the "Glory to the Father..." (with the exception of the canticle in Sunday Morning Prayer Week I). If there is a *Psalm Prayer*, you will pray that after the *Glory to the Father*... and then repeat the *antiphon*. If there is not a

Psalm Prayer, just repeat the *antiphon* after the *Glory to the Father*.... This will be the format for the remaining Psalms as well.

After the Psalms, there will be a *Reading* from Sacred Scripture. This will then be followed by a *Responsory* and the *Gospel Cantic* (*Cantic of Zechariah* for *Morning Prayer* and *Cantic of Mary* for *Evening Prayer*). As with the Psalms, the *canticles* are preceded by the *antiphon* and followed by the *Glory to the Father*... and the *antiphon*.

The *Intercessions* are then prayed.

Morning and *Evening Prayer* conclude with the *Our Father*, a *Concluding Prayer*, and a prayer for God's blessing:

† *May the Lord bless us,
protect us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life.
Amen.*

That's it! Remember, if you ever get lost or confused, go to the *Ordinary* (page 686) and it will tell you what to do.

Keep in mind that the Liturgy of the Hours is *Liturgy* and therefore public and communal in nature. If you can pray with others, this is to be preferred. For communal recitation, you can either pray the entire prayer together or alternate between praying each *strophe* of the Psalm.

It is quite simple once you get the hang of it! But be patient. Learning to pray the Liturgy of the Hours with the Church is a challenge. The psalmist identifies our offering to God in prayer as a *sacrifice* of praise, a *sacrifice* of joy, and a *sacrifice* of thanksgiving.

However, this is not just any sacrifice. It is a sacrifice united with Jesus Christ and his perfect offering to the Father. Therefore, the graces received through praying the Liturgy of the Hours accomplish more for our personal growth in holiness, the good of the Church, and the salvation of the world than we could ever ask or imagine.

If you ever have any questions, please do not hesitate to e-mail us at info@liturgyofthehours.org or call us at (814) 676-1910. You can also find all the page numbers you need for praying Morning and Evening Prayer on our website at liturgyofthehours.org/todays-pages