

PRAYING THE LITTLE OFFICE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

First, we must understand that the Praying of the Hours does not mean that we pray each section for the duration of an hour. We understand “hour” in another sense, in the way of pertaining to specific hours within our day which are consecrated to God and to Mary, set apart (which is what “holy” means) from our usual endeavors, not as 60 minutes each which few laymen and laywomen can afford, but as “the acceptable hour” in which some measure of time is given to God ... Who Himself gives us all time, and even eternity.

Before opening your book pray to the Holy Spirit to guide you, to enlighten your understanding and to enkindle your heart with the WORD of God.

It is traditional (although optional) to pray a Hail Mary slowly in silence before the commencing of the Office thus focusing upon whom we are addressing.

It is also customary to pick up the Hours and kiss them, while slowly making the sign of the Cross, mindful of whom we are about to give our love and hearts to. Then we pray the following, (we mention this because it will not be indicated before every Hour in the Office. It is presumed that you already know this since it is a standard practice in praying any Hour of the Office:

O God, come to my assistance,
O, Lord make haste to help me.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son
and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the
beginning, is now and will be for ever.
Amen.

Deus, in adiutorium meum intende.
Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina.

Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto,
sicut erat in principium, et nunc,
et in saecula saeculorum.
Amen

(to which, "Alleluia" is added, except during Lent)

In this opening, we are focusing on God, aware of our weakness, our fragmentation, our wandering minds and we want in our wills at least to praise God to the best of our ability, and so we ask for His assistance and grace, then given thanks to God, the Most Holy Trinity. We then proceed with the hour as usual.

The term, hour, as we said, does not indicate that each section of the Daily Office should take an hour to pray, but that the word, the hour, relates to a specific time of the day. This division of prayer into hours has its roots in Divine worship as celebrated in the Jewish tradition of the synagogues, even before Christ.

In this edition of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the traditional Latin names are used for the hours. (Matins and Lauds are regarded as one hour, although in practice they are often prayed separately). As the Psalmist sings, "Seven times a day I praise you, O Lord!" So let us look at what are called the "Canonical Hours" that we will find in The Little Office. It will help you to understand that:

Each Canonical Hour Consists of:

- an introduction
- then a Hymn
- followed by an Antiphon.
- Three Psalms
- and then a repeating of the Antiphon.
- The "Little Chapter" reading and responses
- Final prayers and responses
- the Final Blessing
- ends with an Intercession for the Dead

THE CANONICAL HOURS

- **Matins:** (from the Latin, *matutinas vigiliis*, or "morning watches") The hour of Matins was a nocturnal hour, it was celebrated at midnight onwards and often joined with Lauds as a continuing vigil of prayer. Within this is a great consolation, the realization that even now, in many parts of the world, midnight is the advent of the expectant new day... and "we do not know the hour when the Lord will come!"

- **Lauds:** (pronounced: lawds or loords) The word Lauds is derived from the Latin word *laus* meaning, praise. This is always an hour of praise, as is clear from the Psalms chosen within the text, which recall the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and the gift of new life that comes to us in this new God- given day.
- **Prime:** (pronounced: prime) (Latin: *prima*, first) was originally the earliest Canonical Hour, *prima hora*, and the first hour of the Roman day. Prime is celebrated at 6 AM, an hour in which we consecrate the forthcoming day to God, giving thanks for the awakening to life and being open to God's gift of Himself through his Word.
- **Terce:** (pronounced: terse) (Latin: *tertia hora*) Called thus because the Romans celebrated it at what they regarded the third hour of their day, which was 9 AM in the morning. Terce is often called the golden hour, or the Hour of the Holy Ghost, recalling the hour when the disciples went up to the Temple to pray. It also commemorates the event at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon Mary and the Apostles at this hour. As did the Romans, we celebrate Terce at approximately 9 AM and it is, therefore, a prayer inspiring us to begin the day under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in union with Mary Our Mother. "Come Holy Spirit!"
- **Sext:** (Latin, *sexta hora*) This was the sixth hour of the Roman day, what is for us about Midday. At midday the time we recall the hour that Christ was raised upon the Cross of Salvation for us, and Mary His faithful Mother standing faithfully by Him in His suffering. This is midday, and this hour can be regarded as an oasis of prayer, a time to turn to Our Savior and pray in union with Mary for the suffering of the world.
- **None:** (pronounced: *known*) (Latin, *nona hora*) This hour was regarded by the Romans as the ninth hour, hence the Latin name *nona*, which for us occurs about three o'clock in the afternoon. It was at the ninth hour, we will remember, that Jesus cried out in his agony, 'Eloi, Eloi, lamma sabacthani?' which means, 'My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me!' This is the hour of Crucifixion, the hour of Redemption, and in this hour we bring all our burdens to Christ on the Cross, praying for all poor sinners with and through Mary His Immaculate Mother.

- **Vespers:** (Latin, *Vespers Espera*) was a name given to the evening star of Venus, which rising in the evening was a call to prayer, a light in the Heavens announcing the drawing on of the day, Vespers is prayed anytime after the Hour of None and before Compline.
 - **Compline:** (pronounced: complin) From the Latin word (Latin, *complere*, or to complete) so named because it is the last hour of the day to be prayed. Compline is a beautiful way to complete our day, to pray with Mary and to Mary for the dying and for all those upon whom the night either of the spirit or in fact will soon fall. We pray for Gods protection for the night, conscious of the many evils perpetrated in the nocturnal hours. It is an hour in which we commend everything and surrender everything to God.

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This, hopefully, will give you a basic idea of when the hours are traditionally prayed, even while there is some flexibility within them. We are asked in our Carmelite Rule to pray Matins and Lauds in the morning and Vespers and Compline in the evening. If there is a desire and time to do more, then, of course, this is encouraged. It is better to pray with all your heart the times required rather than attempting all 8 hours every day in haste and anxiety.

You do not have to go to different sections or pages in the book each day. This is part of the beauty and simplicity of the Little Office. You repeat the same prayers each day. This allows you to familiarize yourself with the Readings until they come to you naturally, even by memory! This is not "rote". It is immersion in prayer and in the ever unfolding depths revealed to you in each prayer. There is no rush! The world rushes you. God does not. Take the time to read and learn the Latin, side by side as well, and in this way praying as your forebears did for 100 generations in a beautiful and unbroken continuity. Latin has always been the unique and distinctive language of the Catholic Church. Everything written from the Seat of Peter in Rome is written in Latin. Its beauty is ever ancient and ever new.

Each hour is much like the Roman Office in its structure -- psalms with antiphons, a hymn, a Scripture reading (three at Matins), a versicle and response, a Gospel canticle at some hours, and a closing prayer.

Overall, though, the Little Office of Our Lady differs markedly from the Roman Divine Office in that **it is basically the same every day**. Here are the variations:

- There are three nocturns (i.e., sets of three readings or "lessons") given at Matins, but only one nocturn is used each day, and the choice of nocturn is determined by the day of the week.
- The psalm antiphons and the readings and versicles/responses vary during Advent and again during Christmas
- There are minor variations throughout during the Easter season

Perhaps needless to say, the psalm antiphons, lessons, versicles, and orations are very pointedly Marian -- and they're frequently direct quotations from Scripture, but not necessarily from a part of Scripture where one would immediately associate with Mary.

The psalms themselves don't change from day to day, or seasonally, so the entire Little Office of Our Lady includes only 20-30 psalms.