

Tridentine Community News

April 3, 2011

The Divine Office - Part 9

Why Pray the Divine Office?

It can be challenging for the average layman to find time to pray. Attending daily Mass can be difficult to fit into the busy day of a working person, parent, or student. Why should laypeople even consider praying the Divine Office when time is so precious?

The simplest answer is that the Breviary is the Prayer of the Church. Like the Holy Mass, the full Divine Office follows a liturgical calendar and can help one integrate one's prayers and thoughts into the seasons of the Liturgy. No other form of prayer will do this so systematically, or with such a connection to others offering the same prayers worldwide. Those who pray the Breviary unite not only with other individual laypeople and clerics, but with the religious who pray this liturgy in community every day. A regular practice of formalized prayer is a structured way to develop one's spiritual life and focus one's mind on God throughout the day.

Time Commitment

A study was done by divinumofficium.com showing the time it takes to pray (recited, not sung) the various hours of the Extraordinary Form Breviary. Different charts are presented because of variances in the length of the Hours for Ferias, Sundays, First Class Feasts, and Second or Third Class Feasts. For purposes of this discussion, they are close enough to one another to make a point. Times in minutes and seconds to recite the Divine Office on a Feria are: Matins: 16:21, Lauds: 8:26, Prime: 7:11, Terce: 3:56, Sext: 3:50, None: 3:42, Vespers: 7:23, and Compline: 7:39.

In comparison, praying the Holy Rosary takes approximately 20 minutes. Granted, the Rosary can be recited from memory, whereas a book is needed for praying the Divine Office. The point is that praying the full Breviary, or at least selected Hours from it, is not that different a time commitment than other forms of prayer or devotions. As we have shown in previous columns, praying one of the Little Offices can be even less of a time commitment. Like the Rosary, many Little Offices are memorizable, given that some or all of their Hours are the same every day. We therefore submit that while the notion of praying the Divine Office can be somewhat intimidating, the actual statistics prove that the time demand is not so severe, especially if one starts by praying only certain Hour(s).

Public Prayer of the Divine Office

Just as private recitation of the Divine Office has been gaining popularity among laypeople, celebrations open to the public have become more prevalent, including some at monasteries and convents. Some familiar names pop up when discussing such public celebrations, as they are often accompanied by impressive music programs. Vespers is popular, as Benediction is part of the service, and the afternoon hour can be convenient for those in urban settings.

St. Michael's Abbey in Orange County, California celebrates all of the hours of the Ordinary Form Divine Office. Latin is used on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays; English on the other days of the week. A complete daily schedule is available at www.abbeynews.com.

The Brompton Oratory in London, England celebrates Vespers according to the Extraordinary Form every Sunday at 3:00 PM, accompanied by a professional choir. A few miles away, Westminster Cathedral celebrates Vespers at 3:30 PM according to the Ordinary Form in a mixture of English and Latin, accompanied by the Cathedral Boys' Choir.



Locally, most public celebrations of the Divine Office are rather low-key. Our own Assumption Church in Windsor offers Morning Prayer in the Ordinary Form every day at 7:40 AM in the Rosary Chapel. This is prayed from the abbreviated "Christian Prayer" book, an approved shorter version of the Liturgy of the Hours. The Dominican Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament on Middlebelt Road at 13 Mile Road in Farmington Hills offers Vespers in the Ordinary Form at 4:30 PM daily. If you know of additional local sites worth mentioning, please e-mail the address at the bottom of this page.

Our objective in presenting this series has been to expose the treasures of prayer available to all in the full Divine Office and the various Little Offices. More Catholics should be aware of the graces to be received by praying at least part of one of these Offices. Consider making the effort to pray at least one Hour, especially during the remainder of this Lenten season.

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Mon. 04/04 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *St. Josaphat* (Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent)

Tue. 04/05 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *Assumption-Windsor* (Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent)