

Tridentine Community News

July 6, 2025 – Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

The Divine Office – Part 1

Many Catholics are aware to some degree that apart from the Mass, there is another set of structured prayers which are prayed according to a liturgical calendar. That set of prayers is known as the *Officium Divinum*, or Divine Office. With its own changing Propers, the Divine Office is considered the official Prayer of the Church.

The Divine Office has long been regarded as primarily the province of priests and religious, but its recitation by laypeople has been gaining popularity. This column series will introduce this treasure of the Church, with a focus on the Extraordinary Form version.

Terminology

A somewhat interchangeable vocabulary is associated with the Divine Office.

The Divine Office: The traditional title for this set of prayers, so named because there are several “offices”, or liturgical hours, of the day.

Breviárum Románum: The name of the official Latin books comprising the Extraordinary Form Divine Office.

The Breviary: The English name of the book(s) which contain the prayers of the Divine Office. As will be explained in a future column, there are several versions of the Breviary books. It is customary, though not strictly accurate, to refer to the Breviary (books) and the Divine Office (liturgy) interchangeably.

Litúrgia Horárum: The name of the official Latin books comprising the Ordinary Form Divine Office.

The Liturgy of the Hours: The English name of the books comprising the Ordinary Form Divine Office. This term is also often used for the name of the liturgy.

One can thus “pray the Divine Office”, “pray the Breviary”, or “pray the Liturgy of the Hours”. In keeping with the names of the Latin books, “praying the Breviary” should only refer to the Extraordinary Form, and “praying the Liturgy of the Hours” should only refer to the Ordinary Form, but these terms are often mixed and used for the other version.

Obligation to Pray the Divine Office

Canon 276 §2.3 states: “priests and deacons aspiring to the presbyterate are obliged to carry out the liturgy of the hours daily according to the proper and approved liturgical books; permanent deacons, however, are to carry out the same to the extent defined by the conference of bishops.”

Canon 1174 §1 states: “Clerics are obliged to carry out the liturgy of the hours according to the norm of Canon. 276, §2, n. 3; members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, however, are bound according to the norm of their constitutions.”

Canon 1174 §2 states: “Other members of the Christian faithful, according to circumstances, are also earnestly invited to participate in the liturgy of the hours as an action of the Church.”

Canon 1175 states: “In carrying out the liturgy of the hours, the true time for each hour is to be observed insofar as possible.”

In a monastery or convent, praying the Divine Office is relatively easy to do, as scheduled services are typically held in the facility’s chapel throughout the day. For priests, religious, and laymen on their own, however, this can be challenging. If you ever see a priest in public praying from a book, he is likely praying his Breviary. As a practical matter, other responsibilities make it nigh impossible for many priests to pray the entire Divine Office every day.

In 2000, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments clarified Canon Law and stated that unless one’s Ordinary (bishop) provides dispensation for a serious reason, priests and transitional deacons (seminarians) have a grave obligation to pray at least Lauds and Vespers every day.

The Hours

1. Matins (during the night), divided into up to three Nocturns (night readings). In the Ordinary Form, Nocturns have been eliminated and Matins have become the “Office of Readings”
2. Lauds (Dawn prayer)
3. Prime (Early morning prayer, around 6:00 AM). Prime was suppressed in the Ordinary Form.
4. Terce (Mid-morning prayer, around 9:00 AM)
5. Sext (Mid-day prayer, around noon)
6. None (Mid-afternoon prayer, around 3:00 PM)
7. Vespers (Evening prayer)
8. Compline [pronounced COM-plun] (Night prayer, before retiring)

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Tue. 07/08 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *St. Benedict/Holy Name of Mary, Windsor* (St. Elizabeth of Portugal, Queen & Widow)

