

Rubrics for the Divine Office: A Concise Guide

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In the following text, all numbers refer to the *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours* (which can be found in Volume I of the 3-volume Divine Office) unless otherwise indicated. All the directives given here are taken from that document, apart from a few additional suggestions based on my own experience [which are enclosed in square brackets]. The terms *Breviary*, *Divine Office*, and *Liturgy of the Hours*, all refer to the same cycle of prayer prescribed by the Church; the first two terms can also refer to the books containing these prayers.

It is useful to note that the most important saints' days and celebrations are called SOLEMNITIES, the moderately important ones are called FEASTS and the least important saints are MEMORIAS. The memorias may be obligatory or optional. Days on which no solemnity, feast or memoria fall are called FERIAS.

The core of the breviary is the PSALTER which is the 4 week cycle of psalms for ferias. Saints' days and special seasons (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter) have their own material, known as the PROPER, which may replace some or all of the material from the psalter. There is also a collection of texts known as the COMMON which can be referred to: so a minor martyr might take the psalms from the psalter, a reading from the Common of Martyrs, and her own closing prayer from the Proper for her feast-day.

Portions of texts are typeset as follows:

My commentary.

Spoken by the presider.

Spoken by the congregation.

Spoken by the congregation but omitted in Lent.

(A) General points for planning the Office of the day

If a priest or deacon is present and able, he should preside, and use the presidential chair. In this case it is proper for him to greet the people, begin the introductory verse, begin the Lord's prayer, offer the concluding prayer and bless and dismiss the people. A lay presider does not stand in the sanctuary, not greet or bless the people. (253-358)

The office is intended to be sung, but this is not always practical. It is more important to sing more of the office at the "hinges" of Lauds (= Morning Prayer) and Vespers (= Evening Prayer), and on the more holy days. In particular, this applies to acclamations and responses, then also to antiphons and psalms. (267-284)

Your diocesan *Ordo* will normally indicate what liturgies may or must be celebrated on a given day, and which texts are proper. [Sometimes the breviary will provide more material for a saint than is needed to keep his or her memoria.] The *Ordo* or rubrics (rules in red print) in the breviary will normally indicate which of these texts are proper. On a **memoria**, unless explicitly indicated to the contrary, Lauds and Vespers only take the Benedictus/Magnificat antiphon and closing prayer from the saint's material (if there is no Proper closing prayer, the Common or the prayer of the day may be used); the Office of Readings takes only the second reading, following responsory, and closing prayer; and Compline and Prayer During the Day do not change at all. (234-240)

Public celebrations follow the calendar of the local diocese, supplemented by the religious order serving the place (if any) and parish patrons/dedication anniversaries. On ferial days, any saint appearing in the Roman Martyrology (calendar of saints) for that day may be celebrated; on ferial Saturdays, the memoria of Our Lady may be celebrated. For pastoral reasons, a votive office (a free-will honouring of a particular saint or mystery of Jesus or Mary) may be celebrated on all but a few proscribed days of the year, even ferial Sundays. (240-245)

For personal celebration of the Office, you may follow the calendar of the diocese/order to which you belong or that of the place where you reside, except on feasts and solemnities. If you celebrate the Office in common with a community which follows a different calendar or rite, you fulfil your own obligation to the equivalent Hours of the Office. (241-243)

During ordinary ferial weekdays (including Advent I, and Eastertide and Christmastide after their Octaves), readings, concluding prayers, hymns and intercessions may be taken from another ferial day of the same season. For a good pastoral reason, psalms may also be switched in this way. (251-252)

(B) Common Elements in the Different Hours

(1) Hymns

Hymns traditionally highlight the season more closely than Scripture and draw worshippers by their lyrical character. Normally they should be concluded by a doxology addressed to the same Person as the hymn itself. Translations from Latin and worthy new compositions in the vernacular may be used, as approved by Episcopal conferences. (173-178)

(2) Psalmody

Psalms are primarily songs to be sung, not texts to be read. Some are addressed to God, others are to be sung in His presence. They capture varied emotions and we - baptised members of the Church - pray them as our share in the ministry of Christ who Himself offers a constant sacrifice of praise to the Father. They should be treated according to genre, with it being more important to sing the psalms of thanksgiving than the wisdom or historical material. [It is also valuable to consider whether the psalm was written to be sung by the whole people, by a cantor or choir, or in a responsorial form.] (100-109, 278-279)

Each psalm is accompanied by a heading and a phrase from New Testament or Patristic writing: these help focus us on the (often Christological) meaning of the psalm for us. A supplementary book is available with “psalm-prayers” which can be used after each psalm. (110-112)

The Antiphon must be said at least at the start of the psalm. It can also be used at the end, or after every strophe. Ideally the antiphon should be sung, and if no setting is available, a more singable antiphon may be substituted, as long as it complements the psalm. On ferial days when the psalmody is said, not sung, the Scriptural/patristic phrase may be used instead of the antiphon. A reverent silence is recommended following the psalm (and final antiphon), after which the psalm-prayer may be said. (113-114,123,202,274)

There are two traditional ways of praying a psalm in common (122):

- The congregation is divided into two parts who say or sing together alternate verses or strophes;
- The congregation repeats a responsorial phrase alternating with the cantor or choir saying or singing the verses or strophes.

If a long psalm is split into two or more parts in one Hour, the parts may be said together using only the first part’s Antiphon. Between parts there may be a pause, or the *Glory be* may be said, or the next part may follow immediately. But if the literary character suggests that the antiphon should be repeated after each verse, then the *Glory be* is not used until the very end. (115,124-125)

On Sundays, the psalms from another Sunday may be substituted; and in public celebrations, other psalms may be used to help introduce the congregation to a wider range of psalmody. (247)

(3) Readings

The short scripture readings (sometimes called “chapters”) given in the Office may be replaced by other long or short readings on ferial days or for pastoral reasons. If changing the reading, preference should be given to texts from the Office of Readings or Mass of the day, and to seasonal texts otherwise left unread for various reasons. (44-46)

(4) Responsories

The *Responsory* is meant to be the congregation’s response to the reading they have just heard. Ideally it should be sung, and might be followed by a reflective silence. The “short responsory” provided may be replaced by any other said or sung responsory approved by the Bishops

(5) Intercessions

In public prayer, the first intercession is to be read by the presider and is in a form inviting the congregation to pray. The following intercessions are in two parts. The reader may read the first part and have the congregation respond with the second part; or the reader may read both parts and have the congregation respond either by prayerful silence or by the fixed response accompanying the first intercession. (189-193)

(C) Directions for each individual Hour

I: The Invitatory

I1: (34) *Lord, open our lips.* (The sign of the cross is made on the lips.)
And we shall praise your name.

I2: (34) Antiphon of the day, followed by Psalm 94 (or 99, 66, or 23) and *Glory be.*
It is suggested that the antiphon be repeated after each verse of the psalm.

(35) The whole invitatory (I1+I2) normally precedes the first office said during the day, whether Readings or Lauds. If Lauds is said first, however, I2 may be omitted.

Common and Proper invitatory verses and Psalm 94 may be found on pages [3]-[5] of the 3-volume Divine Office.

R: Office of Readings

(56) As a true dialogue with God, we address Him in prayer through psalms and then listen to the Word.

(57-59, 70-73) Traditionally this Office is kept at night-time, and can be said any time after Vespers of the preceding day, but can also be celebrated any time on the day itself. On Sundays, solemnities and feasts there is an option to celebrate it at night with a more extended set of readings.

(145-146) Our version of the Divine Office includes Scripture readings on a one-year cycle. There is an additional lectionary available which gives a two-year cycle of Scripture complementing the two-year cycle of weekday Mass readings, and covering almost the whole Bible.

(248-249) If a special celebration trumps the ordinary reading on one day, the readings on the other days may be rearranged to include the missed material or omit the least relevant passages. For pastoral reasons, e.g. on a retreat or in Christian unity week, other appropriate scripture readings may be chosen in ferial time.

(159-168) There is also a lectionary available with a much wider selection of patristic texts for the second reading. Episcopal conferences may also add material from outstanding local Catholic writers.

(250) The patristic texts may be replaced by a quasi-continuous reading of any Father suitable for the liturgy, even in privileged seasons.

Office of Readings before and joined to Mass (98):

(this combination is discouraged because Mass has its own cycle of readings)

Office of Readings as normal R1-R8

Mass begins with the Gloria (if required) and Opening Prayer.

Office of Readings before and joined to another Hour (99):

Office of Readings as normal R1-R10, but hymn appropriate to the other Hour may be used at R2.

Introductory verse and doxology, and hymn (used at R2), of the following Hour are omitted.

R1: (60) If said before Lauds, the full invitatory I1+I2 is used; if after, the usual doxology:

O God, come to our aid. (The sign of the cross is made.)
O Lord, make haste to help us.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.
Alleluia (except in Lent)

R2: (61) An appropriate hymn for the time of day. *See Hymns.*

R3: (62) Psalmody. *See Psalmody.*

R4: (63) Versicle

R5: (64, 66,202) Scripture reading, perhaps followed by a reflective silence

R6: (65,202) Responsory, perhaps followed by a reflective silence (the part usually repeated may be omitted if the responsory is being said rather than sung, and the text makes sense without it).

R7: (64, 67,202) Patristic or hagiographical reading, perhaps followed by a reflective silence.

R8: (65,202) Responsory, perhaps followed by a reflective silence (the part usually repeated may be omitted if the responsory is being said rather than sung, and the text makes sense without it).

R9: (68) On Sundays, solemnities and feasts, optional *extended vigil* material may be added to keep a more extended celebration; in this case the office must be celebrated at night.

R10: (68) On Sundays, solemnities and feasts, except in Lent: The *Te Deum* (see insert card or pages [6]-[7] of the 3-volume breviary; the final stanzas after *a place in eternal glory* may be omitted).

R11: (69) Proper closing prayer. Ferial weekdays take their closing prayer from the previous Sunday, but can be substituted by any other Sunday; the full set can be found in Appendix I of the 3-volume breviary. The prayer is introduced by *Let us pray*, and normally concludes with:

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

R12: (69) *Let us praise the Lord.*

Thanks be to God.

If there is a particular need to celebrate a saint's memoria in the privileged seasons of Advent II, the octave of Christmas, or Lent, the obligatory R7-R8 for the season are followed by R7-R8 for the saint and R11 is the prayer of the saint. (237-239).

X: Extended Vigils

Directions for expanding the Office of Readings to make a Vigil celebration for Sundays, solemnities or feasts can be found in Appendix II of the 3-volume breviary.

X1: (73 Optional) Canticles

X2: 73 Gospel – for Mass on solemnities and feasts, as directed in Appendix II.

X3: (73 Optional) Homily

L: Lauds

(38) Lauds sanctifies the day from the start; the dawn symbolises the light of Christ upon the world.

L1: (41) If Lauds is said after Office or Readings,

O God, come to our aid.

(The sign of the cross is made.)

O Lord, make haste to help us.

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

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Alleluia (except in Lent)

But if Lauds is the first office of the day, I1 or I1+I2 is used instead.

L2: (42) A suitable hymn (morning or seasonal). *See Hymns.*

L3: (43) Morning psalm, OT canticle, psalm of praise. *See Psalmody.*

L4: (44-46) Scripture reading. *See Readings.*

L5: (47: Optional) A brief homily

L6: (48,202: Optional) A time of silence

L7: (49,202,281: Optional) Responsory. *See Responsories.*

L8: (50) Solemn Gospel canticle of praise: Benedictus with seasonal antiphon before and after (the sign of the cross is made).

L9: (51,182,188) Intercessions, in the form of invocations to consecrate the day and its work to God. Special intentions may be added. They are addressed directly to God. *See Intercessions.*

L10: (52,194-196) The Lord's Prayer is said by all, and may be preceded by a brief introduction. A selection of introductory phrases can be found in Appendix IV of the 3-volume breviary.

L11: (53) Concluding prayer (seasonal), with no introduction, and normally ending with:

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

L12: (54) Blessing:

(i) Where a priest or deacon presides in public:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

May Almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Go in the peace of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

(ii) Where a lay minister presides in public, or in private recitation:

The Lord bless us, and keep us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

Amen.

If there is a particular need to celebrate a saint's memoria in the privileged seasons of Advent II, the octave of Christmas, or Lent, the obligatory L11 for the season is followed by the Benedictus Antiphon and L11 for the saint. (237-239).

Lauds before and joined to Mass (94):

Start with Doxology and Office Hymn L1-L2 **OR** Entrance Hymn and celebrant's greeting.

L3 psalmody.

No penitential rite; but Kyrie may be said; Gloria if required

Everything else as at normal Mass beginning with Opening Prayer and Liturgy of the Word, except:

L9 may be used as material for Prayer of the Faithful.

L8 must precede the prayer after communion (coming after the communion song, if sung.)

D: Prayer During the Day

(74-78) Every priest and religious should celebrate one office during the work of the day, to sanctify it. Those in choir or on retreat should say all three parts.

D1: (791) *O God, come to our aid.* (The sign of the cross is made.)

O Lord, make haste to help us.

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

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Alleluia (except in Lent)

D2: (79-80) A suitable daytime hymn. *See Hymns.*

D3: (79,81-83) Three psalms (perhaps including a long one with optional division). *See Psalmody.*

- If saying more than one round of Prayer During the Day, complementary psalms are provided (see after Night Prayer in the 3-volume breviary).

- When there are proper antiphons, they are used only before the first psalm and after the third.

D4: (79-80,202) Scripture, perhaps followed by a reflective silence. *See Readings.*

D5: (79) Versicle.

D6: (79) Seasonal closing prayer (saints' proper prayers are not normally used here on memorias), introduced by *Let us pray*, and with the short conclusion provided in brackets after the version given for use at Lauds.

D7: (79) *Let us praise the Lord.*

Thanks be to God.

Prayer During the Day before and joined to Mass (95):

Start with Doxology and Office Hymn D1-D2 **OR** Entrance Hymn and celebrant's greeting.

D3 psalmody.

No penitential rite; but Kyrie may be said; Gloria if required

Everything else as at normal Mass beginning with Opening Prayer and Liturgy of the Word.

Prayer During the Day following and joined to Mass (97):

Mass as normal up to prayer after communion.

D3 Psalmody

D6 Concluding prayer

Dismissal and blessing of Mass.

V: Vespers

(39) Vespers is a thanksgiving, and a memorial of the evening prayer of the Last Supper.

V1: (41) *O God, come to our aid.* (The sign of the cross is made.)

O Lord, make haste to help us.

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

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Alleluia (except in Lent)

V2: (42) A suitable hymn (evening or seasonal). *See Hymns.*

V3: (43) Two psalms (or one long one with optional division), NT canticle. *See Psalmody.*

V4: (44-46) Scripture reading. *See Texts, and note that since Vespers normally contains a NT canticle it would be against Tradition to follow this with an OT reading (158c).*

V5: (47: Optional) A brief homily.

V6: (48,202: Optional) A time of silence.

V7: (49,202,281: Optional) Responsory. *See Responsories.*

V8: (50) Solemn Gospel canticle of praise: Magnificat with seasonal antiphon before and after (the sign of the cross is made).

V9: (51,185-188) Petitions – which should be linked to praise of God or recollection of salvation history. Additional petitions may be added, putting the needs of the world and the universal Church before local causes, and always concluding with one for the faithful departed. They are addressed directly to God. *See Intercessions.* Alternative sets of short intercessions for Vespers can be found in Appendix III of the 3-volume breviary.

V10: (52,194-196) The Lord's Prayer is said by all, and may be preceded by a brief introduction. A selection of introductory phrases can be found in Appendix IV of the 3-volume breviary.

V11: (53) Concluding prayer (seasonal), with no introduction, and normally ending with:

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

V12: (54) Blessing:

(i) Where a priest or deacon presides in public:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

May Almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Go in the peace of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

(ii) Where a lay minister presides in public, or in private recitation:

The Lord bless us, and keep us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

Amen.

If there is a particular need to celebrate a saint's memoria in the privileged seasons of Advent II, the octave of Christmas, or Lent, the obligatory V11 for the season is followed by the Magnificat Antiphon and V11 for the saint. (237-239).

Vespers before and joined to Mass (96: first vespers of tomorrow cannot be attached to Mass of today):

Start with Doxology and Office Hymn V1-V2 **OR** Entrance Hymn and celebrant's greeting.

V3 psalmody.

No penitential rite; but Kyrie may be said; Gloria if required

Everything else as at normal Mass beginning with Opening Prayer and Liturgy of the Word, except:

V9 may be used as material for Prayer of the Faithful.

V8 must precede the prayer after communion (coming after the communion song, if sung.)

Vespers following and joined to Mass (97):

Mass as normal up to prayer after communion.

V3 Psalmody

V8 Magnificat

V11 Concluding prayer

Dismissal and blessing of Mass.

C: Compline

(39) Compline is the last prayer of the day, said before going to bed, not necessarily before midnight.

Either of the Sunday versions may be used on any weekday.

C1: (85) *O God, come to our aid.*

(The sign of the cross is made.)

O Lord, make haste to help us.

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

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Allelluia (except in Lent)

C2: (86) An examination of conscience is recommended. In public celebration, this is done in silence or in a penitential formula from the Missal.

C3: (87) A suitable hymn. *See Hymns.*

C4: (88) One or two psalms for the day of the week – the Sunday ones may always be substituted. *See Psalmody.*

C5: (89,202) Scripture, perhaps followed by a reflective silence. *See Readings.*

C6: (89,202) Responsory: *Into Your Hands*, perhaps followed by a reflective silence. *See Responsories.*

C7: (89) Solemn Gospel canticle of praise: *Nunc Dimittis* with *Save Us* antiphon (the sign of the cross is made).

C8: (90) Concluding prayer (of the day of the week), introduced by *Let us pray.*

C9: (91) Blessing: *The Lord grant us a quiet night and a perfect end.*

Amen.

C10: (92) Any Marian antiphon approved by Bishops – but in Eastertide, *Regina Caeli.*