

How to Pray the Breviary -- An Instructional Course

There is no way to avoid the fact that the Breviary is a complicated book. The Breviary's complexity, however, should not be regarded as a source of discouragement, for several reasons. First, it is certainly possible to learn to pray the Divine Office with some effort and patience. Second, the Breviary can profitably be used without reciting every office, and indeed few are able to do so. Third, learning to use the Breviary is a tremendous accomplishment and ensures that this great treasure will be available to future generations. Much as the monks of Solesmes almost single-handedly revived Gregorian Chant, it is no exaggeration to say that regular users of the Anglican Breviary may be the greatest factor today in whether the traditional Divine Office continues to be celebrated in the Church.

Further, while other forms of the Divine Office -- such as the Prayer Book, the Monastic Diurnal, and the Little Office of Our Lady -- have much to commend them, only the Breviary contains the fullness of that Great Conversation between Man and God which has been going on, uninterrupted, for nearly two thousand years. Since the earliest days of the Church, millions of Christians have recited the prayers of the Breviary in essentially unchanged form: kings and queens, saints, Popes, bishops and clergy, soldiers, labourers, physicians, scientists, explorers, rich and poor, of all races, nations, peoples and tongues. It is this longevity and catholicity which has caused the Breviary to become complex, as generations added bits of devotional content. When one prays the Breviary, one adds his or her small part to that great tapestry woven in prayer by the Church as her offering to the Author of the Universe.

With that said, the reader may embark on the following instructional course, formulated after a full five years of trial and error. I believe that the following represents the easiest and best way to learn to pray the Breviary, but caution that patience is in order. Mastering one office before moving on to others is essential.

A Prayer Before Beginning to Learn the Breviary

ALMIGHTY God, Who pourest out on all who desire it the Spirit of grace and of supplication, deliver us, when we draw near to Thee, from coldness of heart and wandering of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may worship Thee in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. AMEN.

The Lessons

Lesson One: The Organization and Layout of the Anglican Breviary	PG 3
Lesson Two: Compline -- The Simplest Office	PG 4
Lesson Three: Rites and Ranks	PG 6
Lesson Four: "Accidental" and "Essential" Parts of the Office	PG 9
Lesson Five: Lauds -- The First "Twin"	PG 11
Lesson Six: Vespers -- The Second "Twin"	PG 14
Lesson Seven: How to Commemorate Lesser Feasts	PG 17
Lesson Eight: Nocturns -- The Foundation of Matins	PG 20
Lesson Nine: Matins -- The "Parent" Office	PG 26
Lesson Ten: The Day Hours of Terce, Sext and None	PG 32
Lesson Eleven: Prime -- The Odd Hour	PG 35
Lesson Twelve: The Great Triduum	PG 38

Lesson One: The Organization and Layout of the Anglican Breviary

The Anglican Breviary's strength is in its simple and logical organization. Just as the Divine Office is a progression of prayer throughout the day, and the Office is said on each day progressing through the Church Year, the Breviary's organization is, at base, chronological, like a Prayer Book lectionary.

The Anglican Breviary contains five major Sections, conveniently noted by a letter in the upper right corner of each page: A, B, C, E and F (the "D Section," dealing with movable feasts, can be omitted for now).

The "A Section": This section contains the Ordinary of the Office. Just as the Mass has a fixed form upon which is superimposed the lessons and prayers of the day, the Divine Office consists of an "ordinary" form into which are placed the variable psalms, lessons and prayers which make each day's celebration unique. The A Section contains the "skeleton" upon which each of the offices are built.

The "B Section": This section contains the weekly Psalter. If one were to recite each office each day, one would recite all 150 Psalms in the course of one week. This section is very straightforwardly organized by day and office (i.e., the Psalms for all eight offices of Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, etc.).

The "C Section": This section contains the Proper of the Season, that is, those lessons, antiphons and prayers which are "proper" to the days which are not saints' days. This section contains the materials for non-saints' days in Advent, Christmastide, Epiphanytide, Septuagesima, Lent, Eastertide, Ascensiontide, Pentecost, and Trinitytide. On Sundays or *feriae* (i.e. days upon which no saint is commemorated) -- "ordinary days" -- this Section will be used.

The "E Section": This section contains the Proper of the Saints, which as its name implies, gives the variable material used on each saint's day. Since most of the days of the year are now saints' days, the E Section is used frequently to supply readings and prayers.

The "F Section": This section is known as the Common of Saints. It sets forth readings, psalms and prayers not according to named saints, but according to categories, such as "Apostles," "Martyrs," "Doctors," "Abbots," etc. The material here is used on the feast days of saints who are not important enough to have every element of the office "proper" to them (which would then be in the E Section, the Proper of Saints). Very few feasts are important enough to have a whole office "proper" to them (Corpus Christi, for example, is one); most set forth some proper readings in Section E but then direct the reader to use antiphons, brief lessons, etc. from the appropriate Common in Section F.

It should be apparent that if the entire Divine Office is said, Section A is gone through in one day, Section B in one week, Sections C and E over one year, and Section F is referred to intermittently to supply elements as needed.

Lesson Two: Compline -- The Simplest Office

Now that the reader is familiar with the structure of the Breviary and its various sections, Compline may be tackled.

Compline -- said at bedtime -- is the simplest office in the sense that it uses the fewest number of variable elements. On every day of the Church Year, Compline requires only the fixed form in Section A, and the day's Psalms in Section B.

Compline does not concern itself with saint's days, so there is absolutely no need to worry about whom is being celebrated. The sole exception is that on exceptionally "high" feasts, such as the Immaculate Conception, the Psalms for Sunday Compline may be used.

Mastering the office of Compline takes three steps:

- (1) Become familiar with its form in Section A, and see how much of it is fixed no matter what day it is;
- (2) Set a ribbon or icon card at the appropriate day in the weekly Psalter, Section B;
- (3) Begin the recitation in Section A, turning to Section B to pick up the day's Psalms when necessary.

The fixed form of Compline begins at page A45 and is as follows:

Section A

- "Pray, Sir [if alone, Lord] give me thy blessing," followed by the Benediction
- The Brief Lesson
- "Our help is in the Name of the Lord, etc."
- Our Father (p. A3)
- Confession and Absolutions (p. A4)
- "Turn us then, etc." (p. A45)
- Opening Versicles and Gloria Patri (A2)

Section B

- The Psalms of the day, from the appropriate day in the B Section. The antiphon is begun, followed by the three Psalms, followed by the antiphon in full. After each Psalm, the Gloria Patri is said.

Return to Section A

- The Hymn (p. A45)
- The Little Chapter (p. A45)
- The Brief Respond, which changes only for Passiontide and Eastertide (p. A45-A46)
- The Nunc Dimittis with its antiphon (p. A46)
- The Preces (p. A46-A47)
- The Collect of the Office [NOTE: One not in Holy Orders substitutes the following for "The Lord be with you" -- "Lord, hear my prayer; And let my cry come unto thee."]
- The Closing Versicles (p. A47)
- The appropriate Marian Antiphon (p. A8-A9)
- The Our Father, Hail Mary, and Apostle's Creed (p. A2)
- The Sacrosanctae (p. A10)

As you can readily see, the office of Compline takes approximately twenty minutes to recite, although with practice the average time will be reduced to fifteen.

While there is a good deal of flipping back and forth within the A Section, due to the most common prayers being separated out and placed at pages A1 through A10, the only aspect of Compline which may change from day to day are the Psalms taken from the correct day in the B Section.

The reader should take care to recite Compline carefully in the above manner for at least one month before moving on to another office. Indeed, the basic structure of Compline is identical to that of the other offices: preliminary prayers, followed by Psalms, hymns and canticles, a collect, and closing prayers.

Congratulations on mastering the first office!

Lesson Three: Rites and Ranks

The way in which the Divine Office is recited differs according to whether the day is a feast or feria (weekday). As explained below, there are three "rites" under which the Office may be said. In addition, the very nature of the Church's Kalendar causes feasts to conflict with each other. For instance, if the Feast of St. Matthew falls on a Sunday, which is celebrated? Is one feast somehow commemorated in the Office of the other, ignored entirely, or transferred to another day? This issue has caused the Church to assign feasts a "rank," so that such conflicts can be resolved. This lesson provides an overview of both "rite" and "rank," and where further information for specific feasts can be found.

Rite

It is only natural that the various celebrations of the Church Year should differ in magnitude. As a result, certain elements of the Divine Office change slightly depending on whether the day is an ordinary feria, a minor saint's day, or a major feast. Thankfully, the manner in which the Office changes is very minor.

There are three rites by which the Office is said -- the simple, the semidouble, and the double rite. The simple rite is used on all feriae; the semidouble on minor feasts; and the double rite on most well-known saint's days and on major feasts.

In all cases, the Breviary will indicate the rite of the feast next to the entry of the day, e.g. "XXI Sunday after Trinity, sd" or "St. Martin, d" mean "semidouble" and "double" rite, respectively. There are gradations within the double rite, such as "greater double," "Double of the I Class," and so on -- but these do not change the manner in which the Office is said. They only serve as "ranks" for the purpose of resolving conflicting feasts, as explained below. The Office on all days of the Church Year is therefore either simple, semidouble, or double rite.

Fortunately, only five principal components of the Office change with the rite, and they are easy to learn. Not all of these distinctions will make sense now, but rather will become apparent as each Hour of the Divine Office is learned, and the reader should not stress himself or herself to memorize them now. At this stage, the goal is merely to familiarize oneself with the need to pay attention to rite as each part of the office is learned.

1. Antiphons -- The Psalms recited at the Major Hours (Matins, Lauds and Vespers) are each buttressed about by an antiphon, i.e., a short verse said before and after the Psalm. One will note that every antiphon has an asterisk in the middle, just like every Psalm verse. This asterisk signifies a "caesura," or pause, to be observed in reciting the verse. However, each antiphon before and after a Psalm also contains a dagger.

In Offices of simple and semidouble rite, the antiphon is said only up to the dagger before the Psalm, and is said in full after the Psalm.

In Offices of double rite, the antiphon is said in full both before and after the Psalm. This is easy to remember if you think of the antiphon being "doubled" on "double rite" feasts.

2. Common Commemorations -- In the offices of Lauds and Vespers, after the Collect of the Day and any commemorations of conflicting feasts have been recited, a Common Commemoration is usually said. This Common Commemoration can be found on pages A6-A7 of the Breviary.

In Offices of simple and semidouble rite, the Common Commemoration is said at Lauds and Vespers.

However, in Offices of double rite, the Common Commemoration is omitted.

3. The Preces -- A series of short versicles and responses is said at the conclusion of the Little Hours (Prime, Terce, Sext, None, and Compline). These are called the Preces.

The Preces are said kneeling in Offices of simple rite ("ferial Preces"), and are said standing in Offices of semidouble rite ("dominical Preces").

The Preces are omitted in Offices of double rite.

4. Two Vespers -- The Christian Church has inherited the Jewish custom of reckoning days from sunset to sunset. As a result, it is possible for a feast to have two Vespers assigned to it, i.e., to begin with Vespers on Tuesday, continue through all the Hours of Wednesday, and end with Vespers again on Wednesday. When this occurs, Vespers is said to be "doubled."

Ordinary and lesser feasts do not have this phenomenon, and instead begin with Matins and end with Vespers of that same day. Therefore, in Offices of simple rite, Vespers is not doubled; but in Offices of semidouble or double rite, the feast begins with "I Vespers" and continues until "II Vespers" of the following day.

5. Nocturns -- This will become more understandable after the lesson on Matins, but the Matins office consists of groups of Psalms and lessons called "Nocturns." On days of simple rite, Matins has only one such Nocturn, while on semidouble and double feasts, Matins has three Nocturns. Caveat: In order to shorten Matins and prevent overuse of certain lessons, the Breviary allows Matins to be said with one Nocturn on most semidouble and double feasts as well, so this change occurs more rarely than one would ordinarily imagine.

While this all may seem daunting at first, with time these variations will become second nature. A quick glance at the letter next to a feast's title will indicate whether it is of simple, semidouble or double rite, and these changes will also be reinforced in each lesson dealing with specific offices.

Rank

The Christian Church inherited a lunar calendar from the Jews, upon which our seasonal feasts are reckoned: Easter, and with it Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Septuagesima and the like.

However, the Christian Church also celebrates saint's days on their calendar date, meaning that the feast of All Saints, while always on November 1, may conceivably occur on a Sunday. Consequently, there can be "clashes" between the Church's lunar, seasonal calendar and its solar, sanctoral calendar. To solve this problem, feasts are assigned a specific rank. Because rank and rite both derive from importance, the terminology of both is shared.

Feasts may "clash" in two ways. They may occur on the same day, called "occurrence." Or, due to the fact that Vespers is sometimes doubled, the II Vespers of an ending feast may conflict with the I Vespers of a feast which is just beginning.

A day's Office may be ranked, in ascending order, as one of the following: simple, semidouble, double (also called lesser double), greater double, Double of the II Class, or Double of the I Class.

The easiest way to find an Office's rank is simply to look at its entry in either the Proper of the Season (C Section) or Proper of the Saints (E Section). Thus, the feast of St. Gertrude (November 16) on page E544, is a double. Should it occur on a Sunday, which would be celebrated? Further, would St. Gertrude's feast be omitted, commemorated in the Sunday Office, or transferred to the next available day?

The answer to this question can be found in the two Tables provided on pages xlvi and xlvii of the Breviary. One Table assists with problems of occurrence (two feasts occurring on the same day) and the other with problems of concurrence (I Vespers of an incoming feast conflicting with II Vespers of an outgoing feast).

By using the first Table, we can follow the horizontal line for "lesser double" (the rank of St. Gertrude's Office) until it crosses the vertical line for a "lesser Sunday." By so doing, we find the instruction, "Office of 2nd, Commemoration of 1st." This means that the Sunday Office takes precedence over St. Gertrude's, which is commemorated.

The manner of making commemorations will be treated in the lessons for Lauds and Vespers -- the two services in which commemorations are made.

Again, these principles will be returned to, specifically applied, and reinforced in the lessons for individual offices, where they can be put into practice. In the meantime, the reader should continue reciting Compline as often as possible, familiarizing himself or herself with the weekly Psalter and the Ordinary of the Offices, which are the only two sections of the Breviary needed for the Compline office.

Lesson Four: "Accidental" and "Essential" Parts of the Office

In earlier lessons, the reader became familiar with the various parts of the Breviary, including the weekly Psalter, the Proper of the Season (containing lessons and material for feriae and seasonal feasts) and the Proper of the Saints (containing lessons and material for sanctoral feasts).

The reader also learned that the Ordinary of the Offices (the A Section) provides the skeleton upon which elements -- such as psalms, lessons, and versicles -- are superimposed to create the unique Office of the day.

The Changeable Elements of the Office

For the purpose of knowing where in the Breviary to find the materials to be used in the Office of the day, the Breviary has classified those elements into two categories: (1) the Psalms with their antiphons at all the Hours, and the lessons with their responds at Matins -- the "essential" part of the Office; and (2) everything else, such as invitatories, chapters, brief responds, antiphons on canticles, etc. -- the "accidental" part of the Office.

The First General Rule

The Breviary's straightforward rule is this: unless the specific Proper of the day states otherwise, the essential part of the Office is always to come from the weekly Psalter (B Section) and Proper of the Season (C Section), while the accidental part of the Office is to come from the Proper of the Saints (E Section) or the appropriate Common (F Section).

Put another way, unless the specific Proper of the day states or provides otherwise, the Psalms with their antiphons at all the Hours, and the Matins lessons with their responds, are to be taken from the weekly Psalter and the Proper of the Season. All other elements of the Office are to come from the Proper of the Saints or the appropriate Common.

The Second General Rule

However, the Breviary has a second general rule, and it is this: where the Proper of the day provides some element of the Office, whether Psalms, or lessons, or direction to a Common, such as "All from Common 17," follow that more specific rule.

Example: The Feast of St. Blase (E81-E82) contains no specific rubrics. It provides only a Collect and a Matins lesson iii. Therefore, following the rules outlined above, the Psalms at all the Hours will come from the weekly Psalter, and the Matins lessons and responds will come from the Proper of the Season, except lesson iii which is given in St. Blase's Propers. The rest of the Office will come from the appropriate Common, that of Martyrs, Common 5.

Example: The Feast of the Purification (E76, et seq.) clearly states, "All from Common I of B.V.M.,

except" what is given there as proper. Therefore, this more specific direction controls over the general rule that essential parts of the Office are taken from the weekly Psalter and Proper of the Season. The reader, therefore, should absolutely ignore the Psalms and lessons in the B and C Sections, and recite the Office solely according to the Proper on page E76, supplying whatever is missing from Common I of the B.V.M.

With some practice and as the reader learns actual offices in which to use them, these two rules will become familiar.

The next lesson will be the first to introduce an actual office with more than one changeable element. Compline, the first Hour of the Office learned in this program, contains only one changeable element -- that of the daily Psalms. In Lauds, the reader will have to contend not only with Psalms, but a "Chapter" (short scriptural reading), a Hymn, an antiphon on the canticle *Benedictus*, and a Collect of the Day.

In preparation for the next lesson, please continue reciting Compline and re-reading Lessons Three and Four of this series.

Lesson Five: Lauds -- The First "Twin"

Lauds, traditionally recited in the early hours of the morning, is actually a twin. Its identical sibling is Vespers, the early evening office. As the extended watch of prayer which preceded the early Christian Eucharist became detached from that celebration, it developed into three distinct services: Matins, which as the longest office is a sort of "parent," and two identical twins, Lauds and Vespers. In many ways, Lauds and Vespers dominate the entirety of the Office, and the Little Hours are built around them and borrow elements from them. While in the case of clergy such a Rule would likely be insufficient for private devotion, the layperson who daily recites Lauds and Vespers in many ways recites the "heart" of the Divine Office. Should one add Matins, there would be no question about that conclusion!

Thankfully, Lauds and Vespers are both relatively simple in structure. While they may change slightly depending on the rite of the Office (i.e., the antiphons on the Psalms will be said in full on double feasts), their structure is also fixed.

The Structure of Lauds

The structural outline of Lauds is as follows, with material not always said in brackets:

- [Prayer Before the Office (A Section)];
- The Dual Prayer (Our Father and Hail Mary) (A Section);
- The Opening Versicles (A Section);
- Five Psalms, with their antiphons (usually taken from the weekly Psalter, but may come from the Proper or Common);
- The Chapter;
- The Hymn;
- The Benedictus (A Section) with its antiphon;
- [The Preces, said only on penitential days (A Section);]
- The Salutation, Bidding, and Collect of the Day;
- Commemorations, including the Common Commemoration;
- The Closing Versicles (A Section);
- The final Our Father, with its versicle and response;
- The Seasonal Marian Antiphon.

A Closer Look at the Elements of Lauds

The introductory prayers and versicles of Lauds are self-explanatory. The following elements, however, are changeable, and thus a bit more challenging.

The Psalms

Lauds will always have five, and only five, Psalms. The rule governing from where the Psalms come is treated in Lesson Four: "Accidental" and "Essential" Parts of the Office. To recap:

If the Proper of the day (whether in the C Section or E Section) gives its own Psalms, or directs the reader to a particular Common (as in "All from Common 17") or to a particular day (as in "Psalms of Sunday"), follow the Proper.

If the Proper gives neither Psalms nor direction, the Psalms with their antiphons are taken from the weekly Psalter. The antiphons are said by half or in full depending on the rite of the Office.

The Chapter

The Chapter is a short scriptural reading following the Psalms. The Chapter is always followed by "Thanks be to God" unless the Breviary specifically directs that this not be said.

If the Proper of the day (whether in the C Section or E Section) sets forth a Chapter, or directs the reader to a particular Common (as in "All from Common 17"), follow the Proper. [If the reader is detecting a pattern that the Proper controls above all else, he or she is correct!]

If the Proper give no direction, but the day is a feast, use the Chapter from the appropriate Common (i.e., Common 5 for a Martyr, Common 9 for a Confessor, etc.).

If the Proper gives no direction, but the day is a feria, the Chapter is taken from the weekly Psalter, except in Advent, Lent, Passiontide and Eastertide, when the Ordinary (A Section) gives a Chapter.

The Hymn

The Hymn, with its versicle and response, follows the Chapter. The Hymn is to be found in the same location as the Chapter.

Benedictus

After the Hymn is said the canticle Benedictus, found in the Ordinary of Lauds in the A Section. The Benedictus has its own antiphon, which is said by half or in full depending on the rite of the Office.

The canticle, like every Psalm, is followed by the Gloria Patri. Thus, the reader should say the antiphon, followed by the canticle, then the Gloria Patri, and then the antiphon again.

The antiphon is taken from the Proper of the day, if it gives an antiphon, or directs the reader to a particular Common.

If the Proper gives no direction, use the antiphon from the appropriate Common on a feast, or that from the weekly Psalter on a feria.

The Preces

The Preces are a set of suffrages said only on penitential days, in accordance with the rubric on page A24. As such, they are usually omitted. [NOTE: One not in Holy Orders never says, "The Lord be with you, etc." Instead, he or she replaces it with, V. O Lord, hear my prayer. R. And let my cry come unto thee.]

The Salutation, Bidding, and Collect of the Day

After the Preces, or the antiphon on the Benedictus if the Preces have been omitted, is said the Salutation.

One in Holy Orders says: V. The Lord be with you. R. And with thy spirit. A layman says: V. O Lord, hear my prayer. R. And let my cry come unto thee.

The Salutation is followed by the Bidding: Let us pray.

The Collect of the Day is then said, using the appropriate Trinitarian ending on page A6. The Collect is found in the Proper of the day. On feriae, the Collect is that of the preceding Sunday.

The Commemorations

Following the Collect of the Day are said the commemorations of any occurring lesser feasts or observances. Commemoration will be treated in another lesson, and due to its complexity, at this point the reader should omit commemorations.

However, in Offices of simple or semidouble rite, the appropriate Common Commemoration is said after the Collect of the Day. The Common Commemorations are found on pages A6-A7.

The Closing Versicles and Final Prayers

The Office concludes with the Closing Versicles, final Our Father, versicle and response, and seasonal Marian Antiphon, found on pages A7-A10.

Closing Remarks

Lauds is one of the Major Hours. Due to this fact, it is a complex Office. However, with time, patience and regular recitation, it will cease being complex and instead become rich -- Rich with meaning, devotional content, and grace. The reader should concentrate on reciting Lauds on a regular basis for at least two months before moving on to another office. The principles at work in Lauds, including the interplay between the Proper, Common, and weekly Psalter, as well as the rites of the Office, will recur in virtually every other Hour of the Divine Office. Failure to be secure in how these operations take place in Lauds will only negatively affect the reader's ability to learn other offices and cause frustration. Rest assured that with Lauds and Compline, a morning office and a night office, the reader is fully participating in the worship of the Church, albeit in a limited scope.

Lesson Six: Vespers -- The Second "Twin"

Vespers is identical to Lauds in structure, except that Vespers ends with the final Our Father and does not include a Marian Antiphon:

The Structure of Vespers

- [Prayer Before the Office (A Section), if Vespers is the first office said that day];
- The Dual Prayer (Our Father and Hail Mary) (A Section);
- The Opening Versicles (A Section);
- Five Psalms, with their antiphons (usually taken from the weekly Psalter, but may come from the Proper or Common);
- The Chapter;
- The Hymn;
- The Magnificat (A Section) with its antiphon;
- [The Preces, said only on penitential days (A Section);]
- The Salutation, Bidding, and Collect of the Day;
- Commemorations, including the Common Commemoration;
- The Closing Versicles (A Section);
- The final Our Father, without any versicle and response.

A Closer Look at the Elements of Vespers

The rules governing where to find the above in the Breviary are the same as at Lauds.

The Psalms

Therefore, the five Psalms with their antiphons will come from the weekly Psalter unless the Proper provides specific Psalms or direction (i.e., "Psalms of Common 5," "All from Common 5," or "Psalms of Sunday.")

If the Proper refers to "Vesper 1," or "Vesper 2," etc., this simply means to use the Psalms for Sunday Vespers, paying attention to which fifth Psalm should be said. The weekly Psalter's entry for Sunday has six forms of Vesper Psalms, each with a different fifth Psalm.

The Chapter

The Chapter, followed always by the response, "Thanks be to God" unless the Breviary specifically directs that this not be said, may be found as follows:

If the Proper of the day sets forth a Chapter, or directs the reader to a particular Common, use the Chapter found there.

If the Proper is silent, use the Chapter from the appropriate Common if the Office is of a saint,

or the Chapter from the weekly Psalter on a feria. On feriae in Advent, Lent, Passiontide and Eastertide, the Chapter is found in the Ordinary.

The Hymn

The Hymn, with its versicle and response, follows the Chapter, and is to be found in the same location.

Magnificat

After the Hymn is said the canticle Magnificat, found in the Ordinary of Vespers. This canticle's antiphon is said by half or in full depending on the rite of the Office.

Remember to recite (or chant) the canticle as follows: the antiphon, followed by the canticle, then the Gloria Patri, and then the antiphon again.

The antiphon is found using the same method above. Check the Proper for an antiphon or direction to a Common; if this fails, use the antiphon from the appropriate Common on a saint's day, or from the weekly Psalter on a feria.

The Preces

The Preces are a set of suffrages said only on penitential days, in accordance with the rubric on page A43. As such, they are usually omitted. [NOTE: Remember that one not in Holy Orders never says, "The Lord be with you, etc." Instead, wherever that Salutation appears in the Office, he or she replaces it with, V. O Lord, hear my prayer. R. And let my cry come unto thee.]

The Salutation, Bidding, and Collect of the Day

After the Preces, or the antiphon on the Magnificat if the Preces have been omitted, is said the Salutation, followed by the Bidding ("Let us pray"), and then the Collect of the Day. The Collect is found in the Proper of the day. On feriae, if no specific Collect is given in the Proper, the Collect is that of the preceding Sunday.

The Commemorations

Following the Collect of the Day are said the commemorations of any occurring lesser feasts or observances. Commemoration will be treated in the next lesson, and should be omitted for now.

However, in Offices of simple or semidouble rite, the appropriate Common Commemoration is said after the Collect of the Day. The Common Commemorations are found on pages A6-A7.

The Closing Versicles and Final Prayers

The Office concludes with the Closing Versicles and the final Our Father, found on pages A7-A8.

A Note Regarding the Possibility of Two Vespers

Because the Christian Church has inherited the Jewish practice of reckoning days from sunset to sunset, many feasts have two Vespers. The feast begins with I Vespers on the evening of the first day, and continues through Compline of that night, and Matins and all the Hours of the next day until II Vespers.

All Offices of semidouble and double rite have both I and II Vespers (i.e., their Vespers are "doubled"). As a result, when reciting Vespers, it is important to look at the relevant Proper or Common to ensure that one is using elements for the correct Vespers. At the first Vespers of a feast, simply look for the material titled "I Vespers." For the closing Vespers celebration, use the material under "II Vespers."

Lesson Three, "Rites and Ranks," discussed concurrence -- the phenomenon whereby outgoing II Vespers of a feast conflicts with incoming I Vespers of a new feast. In such a case, one feast will be celebrated and the other commemorated according to its rank.

Very often, the Proper of both feasts will make clear what to do, so the reader need not scramble to find the ranks and have resort to the Tables in the General Rubrics. Usually, the Proper of one feast will state something like "Vespers of following, with commem. of preceding." Thus rubric means that the I Vespers office of the incoming feast is to be celebrated, and the outgoing feast merely commemorated in it. Sometimes the note will be given, "Vespers of preceding, with commem. of following," in which case II Vespers of the outgoing feast is to be celebrated, with commemoration of I Vespers of the next feast.

On occasion, a blend of this will be employed, and the rubric, "Vespers from Chapter of following with commem. of preceding," is seen. This simply means that Vespers is said using the Psalms and antiphons of the outgoing feast, and the Chapter and everything following from the incoming feast. Since most feasts use the weekly Psalter for the Vespers Psalms, this rubric usually effectively means Vespers is said using the elements of the incoming feast. Perhaps this rubric has more effect in churches where the Office is said by clergy in choir, who would be required to change their vestments (if any) from one color to another at the Chapter.

The mechanics of commemoration should be ignored for now, and the Office recited simply according to the feast of the day. How to make commemorations will be treated in the next lesson.

Lesson Seven: How to Commemorate Lesser Feasts

Commemoration is the act of giving recognition to feasts other than the principal one being celebrated in the Office.

Such lesser feasts may come about because two particular saint's days permanently occur on the same date year after year; because in the interplay between the Proper of the Season and the Proper of the Saints a particular saint's day occurs with a seasonally-based feast; or because I Vespers of tomorrow's semidouble or double feast concurs with II Vespers of today's feast.

Such occurrences and concurrences, necessitating commemoration, occur quite frequently. Thankfully, however, the Breviary provides that commemoration be made only at Lauds and Vespers (with one slight exception to this rule noted below).

Further, commemoration is made only once, and at the same place in the Office of Lauds and Vespers -- namely, after the Collect of the Day has been said.

Making Commemoration

To commemorate a lesser occurrence at Lauds, recite the following from the office to be commemorated: (i) its antiphon on the Benedictus; (ii) the versicle and response after its Hymn; and (iii) the Salutation, Bidding, and its Collect.

That's simply all there is to commemoration. If multiple commemorations need to be made, they are made in descending rank order, and the day's rubrics will usually assist in this regard. If the Common Commemoration is also to be said, it is said after all festal/ferial commemorations are made.

Similarly, to commemorate a lesser occurrence (or concurring I or II Vespers) at Vespers, recite the following from the office to be commemorated: (i) its antiphon on the Magnificat; (ii) the versicle and response after its Hymn; and (iii) the Salutation, Bidding, and its Collect.

Example:

Since most commemorations depend on the vagaries of the Kalendar, the only examples which provide reliable practice are those involving feasts which permanently occur or concur.

An example is II Vespers of St. Stephen (December 26), which perpetually concurs with I Vespers of St. John (December 27). The rubrics on p. C69 of the Breviary direct that Vespers is said of St. Stephen, with commemoration of St. John. Remembering that commemoration always involves reciting the antiphon, versicle and response, and Collect, after the Collect of St. Stephen is said the following from C69.

Ant: "This is the same John, etc."

V. "Right worthy of honor, etc."

R. "Who leaned on the Lord's bosom, etc."

Let us pray:

"Merciful Lord, we beseech thee, etc." from C72

Using the Tables at F1-F6

Often, lesser feasts will not have proper antiphons or versicles and responses, but merely proper Collects. In such a case, in order to commemorate them, one must pull those elements from the appropriate Common. For example, if the feast to be commemorated is that of a martyr, and one would therefore use Common 5 in celebrating its Office, one would pull the antiphon, versicle and response needed to commemorate the Office from Common 5 as well.

The Breviary has provided convenient Tables of the necessary elements from each Common needed to commemorate feasts at I Vespers, Lauds and II Vespers. These Tables, found at F1-F6, are arranged in the same order as the Common, and are helpful when commemorating lesser feasts which do not have proper antiphons, versicles or responses.

For example, at I Vespers of St. Agatha (E84), the rubrics direct that Vespers be said of St. Agatha with commemoration of the "outgoing" II Vespers of St. Andrew Corsini, "from Table 7C."

St. Andrew Corsini is a Bishop Confessor, so Common 7 is the Common used to supply the necessary elements for his Office. Table 7C, found on F4, merely pulls the relevant antiphon, versicle and response needed to commemorate his II Vespers and places them together in a convenient location.

Thus, to commemorate St. Andrew Corsini, after the Collect of St. Agatha is said, the antiphon, versicle and response from Table 7C is said, followed by "Let us pray" and the Collect for St. Andrew (E83).

Ninth Lesson at Matins

The "one slight exception" to the rule that commemoration is made only at Lauds and Vespers is this. In cases of occurrence (two observances occurring on the same day), the Ninth Lesson at Matins is the Homily or historic lessons from the Office to be commemorated.

In practice, this is exceedingly rare. First, Offices wherein Matins has 9 lessons is fairly rare. Most Matins offices have merely 3 lessons. The number of such Matins celebrations which involve an occurring feast are rarer still. The vast majority of these involve a Sunday, on which the Ninth Lesson must be Sunday's own Homily, thereby obviating the commemoration (see p. xxxviii of the General Rubrics).

Most occasions in which the rule comes into play is when a feast which outranks a Sunday

occurs on a Sunday. In such a case, lessons vii, viii and ix of the Sunday (i.e., Sunday's "Homily," as will be seen later in the lesson on Matins) are recited as the Ninth Lesson of the supervening feast.

This is very similar to how the Last Gospel at Mass, usually St. John's Gospel, will occasionally be the Gospel of the Sunday when it is superseded by an outranking feast.

A good Ordo Kalendar should alert you to the extremely rare occasion on which the Ninth Lesson at Matins is taken from a commemorated feast.

Final Notes

The Breviary provides excellent guidance regarding when and how to make commemorations. Virtually every occurrence or concurrence of feasts is accompanied by a rubric informing the reader which Office to celebrate and which to commemorate, and usually points one to the correct Table, as in "Vespers of preceding with commemoration of following from Table 5A." In all matters, explicit rubrical directions prevail over generalized rules.

Due to the richness of the Catholic sanctoral Kalendar, commemorations are a frequent occurrence. The reader should remember that commemorations only occur at Vespers and Lauds (and sometimes Matins), are made always in the same manner, and are made in descending order of rank when more than one need be made. The most common cause of commemoration is the fact that I Vespers of one feast frequently conflicts with II Vespers of another (concurrence). The second cause of commemoration is two feasts occurring on the same day (occurrence), resulting in the need to commemorate one at both Lauds and Vespers.

As with all other aspects of the Breviary, with time and practice, commemoration will become easier to accomplish.

Lesson Eight: Nocturns -- The Foundation of Matins

Matins is the "parent office" in the Breviary. It is the longest and most complex. On high feasts, it can take well over an hour to recite well and with devotion -- longer if chanted. The Breviary makes liberal use of rubrical devices to shorten the Matins office from cognate Western Uses other than the Roman. Yet, at base, Matins is structurally fairly simple. Every Matins office, regardless of length, is built around a group of Psalms and lessons called a "Nocturn."

Matins can either consist of one Nocturn or three. When Matins is "of one Nocturn," the group consist of nine Psalms and three lessons.

When Matins is "of three Nocturns," each Nocturn is three Psalms followed by three lessons.

First, we will look at the structure of the Nocturn under both circumstances. Then, the issue of where to look in the Breviary for the various parts of the Nocturn will be dealt with.

Matins of One Nocturn

Matins of one Nocturn consists of nine Psalms said together, followed by three lessons.

The Psalms

As with Lauds and Vespers, each Psalm has a proper antiphon and is always followed by the Gloria Patri. Thus, the Psalm grouping in one Nocturn is said as follows:

Ant. 1
Psalm 1
Gloria Patri
Ant. 1

Ant. 2
Psalm 2
Gloria Patri
Ant. 2

And so forth, through each of the nine Psalms. Of course, the antiphons are said by half or in full depending on the rite of the Office, as has been previously discussed. In Eastertide, all nine Psalms are said under one antiphon, thus:

Ant. 1
Psalm 1
Gloria Patri

Psalm 2
Gloria Patri
etc. through all 9 Psalms

Psalm 9
Gloria Patri
Ant. 1

An easy way to see a typical nine-Psalms group for one Nocturn is to look at Matins of Monday in the weekly Psalter, ignoring the divisions of "I Nocturn," etc.

The Psalm group is always ended with a versicle and response. To see the versicle and response for Matins of Monday, look to p. B42. Several different choices are given, of which the most often said is, "On Ferias through the Year." (When Matins is of one Nocturn, the versicles and responses given after the third and sixth Psalm are simply ignored).

Interstitial Prayers

Following the versicle and response after the nine Psalms is said one Our Father (of which only "Our Father" and "And lead us not, etc." are said aloud) and the appropriate Absolution found on pp. A16-18.

The Lessons

Following the group of nine Psalms and the interstitial prayers are said three lessons.

Just as virtually every Psalm in the Breviary is said with an antiphon, almost every lesson at Matins is said in this form:

"Pray, Lord, give me thy blessing."
Benediction (pp. A16-18)
Lesson
V. "But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us."
R. "Thanks be to God."
Responsory (also called a "respond")

Occasionally, such as in the Office of the Dead or during the Great Triduum, the Breviary will explicitly direct that no Benedictions be said, nor the "But thou, O Lord, etc." As a general rule, however, the foregoing is the standard structure for reciting the three lessons following the nine Psalms when Matins is of one Nocturn.

Visual Representation of One Nocturn

Psalms

Ant. 1

Psalm 1

Gloria Patri

Ant. 1

Ant. 2

Psalm 2

Gloria Patri

Ant. 2

etc.

Ant. 9

Psalm 9

Gloria Patri

Ant. 9

Versicle and Response

Interstices

Our Father

Absolution

Lessons

"Pray, Lord"

Benediction for lesson i

Lesson i

"But thou"

"Thanks be to God."

Responsory 1

"Pray, Lord"

Benediction for lesson ii

Lesson ii

"But thou"

"Thanks be to God."

Responsory 2

"Pray, Lord"

Benediction for lesson iii

Lesson iii

"But thou"

"Thanks be to God."

Responsory 3 (on feasts, replace with Te Deum)

(See p. A16 of the Breviary for a restatement of the above which may be helpful).

Matins of Three Nocturns

On higher ranked feasts and all Sundays, Matins is "of three Nocturns." In such a case, each Nocturn consists of a group of three Psalms said together, followed by three lessons.

At the end of each group of Psalms is said the versicle and response, followed by an Our Father, the Absolution, and then the group of three lessons, each preceded by a Benediction and followed by a Responary.

Represented visually, then, when Matins is "of three Nocturns," each Nocturn is structured thus:

Psalms

Ant. 1

Psalm 1

Gloria Patri

Ant. 1

Ant. 2

Psalm 2

Gloria Patri

Ant. 2

Ant. 3

Psalm 3

Gloria Patri

Ant. 3

Versicle and Response

Interstices

Our Father

Absolution

Lessons

"Pray, Lord"

Benediction for lesson i

Lesson i

"But thou"

"Thanks be to God."

Responary 1

"Pray, Lord"

Benediction for lesson ii

Lesson ii

"But thou"

"Thanks be to God."

Responary 2

"Pray, Lord"

Benediction for lesson iii

Lesson iii

"But thou"

"Thanks be to God."

Responary 3 (on feasts,

Responary after lesson ix in III

Nocturn is Te Deum)

Nocturns II and III simply repeat the above structure with Psalms 4, 5 and 6 and lessons iv, v, and vi for II Nocturn, and Psalms 7, 8 and 9 and lessons vii, viii and ix for III Nocturn.

Where the Elements of a Nocturn Are Found

Unless the Proper of the day (C or E section) gives proper Psalms of its own, or directs the reader to an appropriate Common (such as "All from Common 5"), the Psalms, antiphons, and the versicle and response after each Nocturn are taken from the weekly Psalter. This rule accounts for the majority of feasts.

The Absolution and Benediction prayers are found on pp. A16-18 of the Breviary. A quick glance discloses that on A16-17, a set of 3 Absolutions and 9 Benedictions are provided for Matins of three Nocturns.

When Matins is of one Nocturn (i.e., 9 Psalms and 3 lessons), only one Absolution and three Benedictions are needed. Pages A17-18 give these materials depending on whether the Office is of a saint, of a feria, or whose 3 lessons are Gospel Homilies. A fuller discussion of this will occur in the lesson on Matins itself. For now, the reader should simply familiarize himself with the location of these elements.

The lessons of Matins are taken from the Proper of the Season (C section) on feriae, from the Proper of Saints or appropriate Common on high feasts, and from a mix of both on most ordinary feasts. Again, for now the reader should simply spend time looking through the Breviary and studying the structure of Nocturns.

Practice Nocturns

The simplest way to practice reciting Nocturns is to recite part of the Matins office on Sunday. The Psalms will come from the weekly Psalter; the Absolutions and Benedictions from A16-18; and the lessons from the current Sunday in the C section (check the Ordo Kalendar to determine the current Sunday).

Begin with the Psalms from I Nocturn of Sunday in the weekly Psalter (B3-4). Remember to recite each Psalm with its antiphon before and after (since Sunday is semidouble, the antiphon is only said by half before the Psalm), with the Gloria. After the three Psalms of I Nocturn have been said, recite the versicle and response (B5).

Turn to A16-18. Recite the Our Father, then the Absolution for I Nocturn on A16. Say "Pray, Lord, etc." followed by the Benediction for lesson i (A16). Then recite lesson i for the appropriate Sunday in the Proper of the Season. After lesson i, say "But thou, etc." followed by the Responsory. Repeat the process of saying the Benedictions for lessons ii and iii followed by the lessons themselves, and their Responsories.

Repeat the entire process for the II and III Nocturns, in both cases reciting the Psalms from the weekly Psalter and the lessons from the appropriate Proper. Note, in Matins of three Nocturns (i.e., nine lessons), which Sunday always is, there is no Responsory after lesson ix (the final lesson of the III Nocturn). Instead, the Te Deum is said as on A19-20.

Concluding Thoughts

The Nocturn, whether 9 Psalms and 3 lessons, or three Nocturns of 3 Psalms and 3 lessons each, is the very foundation of Matins. The reader must have a comfort level with the structure of both forms, with how Psalms are recited (with their antiphons, and the versicle and response at the end of a group), and with how lessons are recited (with a Benediction before, and Responsory after each).

While continuing to recite Lauds, Vespers and Compline, the reader should try his hand at reciting the appropriate Nocturns for Matins of the day. On most feasts and all feria, this is simply accomplished by reciting all 9 Psalms in the weekly Psalter for the particular day, followed by the lessons for the day in the Proper of the Season. Integrating any lessons from the Proper of the Saints will be dealt with later.

Lesson Nine: Matins -- The "Parent" Office

Matins is the "parent" office of the Breviary because it is both the longest and the first to have come into being. Matins, with its extended Psalmody and scriptural lessons -- in fact, the only office to have such lessons -- originally constituted the Vigil of prayer before the post-apostolic Eucharist. For this reason, Matins is still in some places called the Office of Vigils.

Because the early Church celebrated the Holy Sacrifice early in the morning, Matins was originally celebrated in the middle of the night. Unlike our present time, when convenience in worship seems to be the order of the day, divine service in the early church began in the evening of the preceding day, continued with vigils throughout the night, and culminated in Mass the following morning -- with the expectation that as Our Lord rose on a Sunday morning, he would do so again at his Second Coming.

While Matins is still said at night in some religious communities, it is usually said upon rising in the modern Church, or anticipated the night before. Because Matins has been so long joined to Lauds, the two are practically regarded as one Office, and clergy under obligation of choir should seek dispensation from the proper authority before separating them. Clergy not under such obligation, as well as laypersons, may freely recite Matins and Lauds separately or together.

Structure of Matins

Being the longest office, Matins also has the greatest number of elements. Roughly classified, the parts of Matins are:

- Opening Prayers;
- Psalm 95 with Invitatory antiphon;
- Hymn;
- Nocturns (either one or three);
- Te Deum on feasts.

Opening Prayers

- Prayer Before the Office (A1);
- Triple Prayer (Our Father, Hail Mary, and Apostles' Creed) said silently (A2);
- Opening Versicles (A2-A3)
[At Matins only, "O Lord, open thou my lips," etc., is said from A3 before the versicles]
- Alleluia or "To thee, O Lord," etc. (A2-A3)

Psalm 95

With the Opening Prayers completed, Matins continues with Psalm 95 (A11). An "Invitatory" antiphon is interspersed throughout the Psalm, which makes recitation somewhat difficult at first.

However, when one remembers that the Office is primarily designed to be chanted in choir, one can see that one group chanting the Psalm with another chanting the antiphon as a refrain would produce a beautiful effect.

The reader may practice reciting Psalm 95 with its Invitatory by using those for ordinary Sundays and feriae, found on A12.

Hymn

Matins continues with a Hymn, such as those seasonal Hymns on A13-A14.

Nocturns

As explained in Lesson Eight, Matins is built around Psalm and lesson groupings called a "Nocturn," whose name reflects Matins' original place as a night-office.

Matins can either be of one Nocturn or three, depending on the rank of the Office (feriae are always of one Nocturn, Sundays always of three).

When Matins is of one Nocturn, the Nocturn consists of 9 Psalms said together, followed by 3 lessons. When Matins is of three Nocturns, each one consists of 3 Psalms followed by 3 lessons.

Within a Nocturn, as in the rest of the Office, Psalms are recited in a particular way, namely with an antiphon and the Glory Be. At the end of the Psalm portion of a Nocturn is always said a versicle and response.

Between the Psalm portion and the lesson portion of a Nocturn is said one Our Father, of which only the first two words and "But deliver us," etc. are said aloud. The Lord's Prayer is followed by an "Absolution" found on A16-A18. The Absolution is not sacramental, but the "foremost" in a group should recite it, i.e. one in Holy Orders or the eldest layperson.

Each lesson of a Nocturn is preceded by a short bidding prayer, "Pray, Lord, give me thy blessing," and a "Benediction." Each lesson is followed by "But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us. Thanks be to God," and a "Responsory."

[N.B. -- If in a group with a foremost present, the Benediction is recited by the foremost and the lector asks his or her blessing by saying, "Pray, Sir," or "Pray, Madam," as necessary].

The foregoing order, schematically represented in Lesson Eight, is followed through all 9 Psalms and 3 lessons (for one Nocturn) or each set of 3 Psalms and 3 lessons (for three Nocturns).

For a restatement of the foregoing regarding Nocturns, see A16.

Te Deum

After the last lesson of the last Nocturn (lesson iii in offices of one Nocturn or lesson ix in offices of three Nocturns), on most Sundays and feasts is said the canticle, Te Deum, found on A19, instead of a final Responsory.

On feriae or other days on which the Te Deum is not said (and the Breviary's specific rubrics will guide in this regard), the final lesson will have a Responsory, which is recited instead.

Joining of Matins and Lauds

Long usage and ancient practice treats Matins and Lauds as practically one office, so that upon the Te Deum or final Responsory of Matins, Lauds is immediately begun with the Opening Versicles. In such a case, Lauds is not begun with the Our Father and Hail Mary as is done when Lauds is said on a "stand alone" basis.

However, Matins and Lauds together make a longer office than many laypersons are able to recite. It is entirely permissible to recite Lauds separately (in which case Lauds is begun with the Dual Prayer).

When Matins is separated from Lauds, it must be brought to a close on its own. At such times, following the Te Deum or last Responsory is said the Salutation ("The Lord be with you, etc." or "Lord, hear my prayer, etc."), followed by the Bidding and the Collect of the Day.

Matins is then completed with the Closing Versicles (A7) and one Our Father said silently.

Finding the Elements for Matins

In what should now be a somewhat familiar pattern, from whence the changeable parts of Matins come depends entirely on whether the day is a feast or feria, and if a feast, on the rank of that feast.

The basic rule is that on feriae, the Invitatory antiphon, Hymn, Psalms and their antiphons are taken from the weekly Psalter, while the lessons and their Responsories are taken from the Proper of the Season.

On feasts, unless the Proper indicates otherwise, the Psalms with their antiphons are from the weekly Psalter, the lessons are a combination of those from the Proper of the Season and the Proper of the Saints, and all else (Invitatory, Hymn, etc.) is from the appropriate Common.

The foregoing rule can be modified by specific directions in the Proper of the day. If the Proper states, "All from Common 9," that directive is to be followed and all of the office is taken from the Common. Obviously, in this case, since the Common gives 9 lessons, a direction "all from Common X" means that the Office is of three Nocturns. This is comparatively rare.

The Proper may give certain elements, such as lessons, or an Invitatory, but not others -- in such a case, what is given in the proper should be used, with the remainder being taken from the usual sources (i.e., Psalms with antiphons from weekly Psalter, lessons from C and E Sections, all else from appropriate Common).

What the Proper of Saints provides will also indicate whether the Matins office is of one Nocturn or three. The vast majority throughout the year are of one Nocturn only; however, if the Proper gives lessons iv, v, and vi, it is immediately evident that Matins will be of three Nocturns since that is the only situation in which such lessons are used.

Invitatory Antiphon

On feriae and ordinary Sundays, the Invitatory Antiphon is taken from the Ordinary of the Office or the correct day in the weekly Psalter (in both sections the antiphon is printed for convenience).

During certain seasons, e.g. Advent and Lent, a particular Invitatory is used daily, which is also given in the Ordinary.

On feasts, use the Invitatory from the appropriate Common unless the Proper provides its own, in which case use the Invitatory in the Proper.

Hymn

On feriae and ordinary Sundays, the Hymn is taken from the weekly Psalter, except in the certain seasons given in the Ordinary, when it is taken from there.

On feasts, the Hymn is taken from the appropriate Common unless the Proper provides a particular Hymn.

Psalms, Antiphons and Nocturn Versicles

On feriae and ordinary Sundays, these are taken from the weekly Psalter.

They are always so taken unless the Proper either directs to a particular Common, gives proper Psalms, or a mix of both.

If Matins is of one Nocturn, recite all nine Psalms straight through, ignoring the versicles and responses that appear after the third and sixth Psalms. If Matins, however, is of three Nocturns, versicles and responses after the third and sixth Psalms are used.

Note further that the Psalter gives different versicles and responses, some for feriae in various seasons and others for feasts. Be sure to use the correct one, and remember that when one is reciting the Office of a feast in a particular season, e.g. Lent, the versicle for feasts and not for feriae in Lent is used.

Lessons and Responsories

On feriae and ordinary Sundays, the lessons with their Responsories are taken from the Proper of the Season. The Responsories may follow each lesson or, in certain months, the Breviary provides a table of Responsories in the C Section. (This will be self-evident when it occurs).

On most feasts, one proper lesson is given by the Proper of the Saints which is combined with the lessons from the Proper of the Season as explained below.

If the Proper of the Saints, however, directs the reader to a particular Common ("All from Common 5"), then the lessons in the C Section must be ignored and the more specific rubric followed. The Proper of the Saints may also give its own specific lessons, in which case, they should be used.

Sometimes the Proper will give only some of the needed lessons, such as lessons iv, v, and vi. When this occurs, unless the Proper directs you to a Common for the remainder: (1) the lessons of the I Nocturn are from the Proper of the Season; (2) any remaining needed lessons are taken from the Proper or, if not given there, from the appropriate Common.

While this all sounds most complex, in practice, the majority of Offices involve lessons either entirely from the C Section, or two from the C Section and one from the E Section. As with all things, practice will make this process easier.

Combining Matin Lessons When Necessary

On most saints' days ranked lower than a greater double, the Proper of the Saints provides one reading called a "Legend." In the old Roman use, any feast ranked double or higher required three Nocturns, and consequently nine lessons.

Since the Proper of the Season provided three (the lessons for I Nocturn), the Legend was broken into three parts at the asterisks (for the II Nocturn), and then the lessons for III Nocturn from the appropriate Common were used.

The requirement that any double feast have nine lessons caused Matins to be excessively long on even "ordinary" feasts, and also caused the III Nocturn Common lessons to be robbed of all freshness by their frequent repetition.

The compilers of the Anglican Breviary looked to other Western uses of the Divine Office which authorized most double feasts to have one Nocturn, and consequently three lessons, only.

This rule is applicable throughout the Breviary whenever a saint's Proper does not give particular II or III Nocturn lessons. Of course, those who wish to make every double feast an office of nine lessons are still free to do so.

Most Breviary users, however, will want to take advantage of the rule which permits lesser saints' days to be offices of one Nocturn.

Matins by Rule 1

To "source" the lessons for such feasts, which are the majority that occur throughout the year: lesson i is taken from the Proper of the Season (with its Responsory); lesson ii is actually lessons ii and iii from the Proper of the Season combined, followed by the Responsory for lesson iii; and the "actual" lesson iii is the Legend given in the Proper of the Saints, followed by Te Deum.

This simplification process is called "Matins by Rule 1."

Matins by Rule 2

"Matins by Rule 2" is much less frequently used, and is needed when the Proper of the Season gives three Gospel Homilies as lessons (e.g., in Lent).

In that event, lesson i with its Responsory is taken from the appropriate Common; lesson ii is the Legend from the E Section with the Responsory for lesson iii from the Common; and then as lesson iii is read the three Gospel Homilies in the Proper of the Season, followed by the Te Deum.

Commemoration

When an office of nine lessons must be commemorated, its III Nocturn lessons combined are read as lesson ix in the principal Office being celebrated.

This occurs very rarely, usually when a major feast displaces a Sunday, and the III Nocturn lessons of the Sunday are read as lesson ix of the Office (in much the same way as the Last Gospel at Mass will be the Gospel of an occurring lesser feast).

Concluding Thoughts

Of all the offices, Matins will take the reader the longest to learn, and several months should be allocated for this purpose. If difficulty is encountered, the reader may wish to break Matins up into parts, and refrain from attempting to recite the entire office until, for example, the issue of Nocturns is thoroughly conquered.

Lesson Ten: The Day Hours of Terce, Sext and None

Reciting the "diurnal," or day office, of Terce, Sext and None may be one of the easiest ways for a modern individual to sanctify his or her work-day. The three day Hours, identical in structure, are each much simpler and shorter than any of the Major Hours or Compline. They can easily be recited at their appointed times -- 9 a.m., 12 noon, and 3 p.m. -- aggregated during the lunch hour, or said alone as time permits.

The day office has several particular "quirks" that prevent it from effectively being learned prior to the Major Hours. With a thorough knowledge of Lauds and Vespers, though, the Little Hours may quickly be tackled.

Structure of Terce, Sext or None

Because the day Hours are identical in structure, Terce may be used as an example of how they are structured.

- [Prayer Before the Office (A Section), if first office recited that day];
- The Dual Prayer (Our Father and Hail Mary) (A Section);
- The Opening Versicles (A Section);
- The Hymn (e.g., A33);
- The Psalms (e.g., from weekly Psalter);
- The Little Chapter and Brief Respond (e.g., A33);
- [The Preces (e.g., A35), if the Preces were recited at Lauds];
- The Salutation, Bidding, and Collect of the Day;
- The Closing Versicles (A Section);
- Final Our Father

The Hymn

The Hymn at Terce, Sext, and None is almost always taken from the Ordinary (A Section). On and during the Octave of Pentecost, the Hymn at Terce is given in the Proper.

However, the doxological ending of the diurnal Hymns may be changed for certain feasts and seasons as given on A5.

The Psalms

The three Psalms at Terce, Sext and None are taken from the appropriate day in the weekly Psalter on Sundays, feriae and most feasts, with the antiphon there given. During certain seasons, the antiphon for the three Psalms is given in the Ordinary (A33-A34). For example, after the I Sunday in Lent, on feriae the antiphon is, "The days of penance," etc. on A34. Of course, if the Proper of the Season gives particular Psalms and/or antiphons, e.g. "Psalms from Common 8," those Psalms should be used.

On some saints' days, the antiphon will be taken from those used for Lauds, as explained below.

The Little Chapter and Brief Respond

On Sundays and feriae, the Chapter and Brief Respond are taken from the Ordinary (A33-A34) according to the season. When no specific Chapter is given, it is taken from Lauds. Of course, if at any time the Proper should provide a proper Little Chapter and Brief Respond, those should be used.

The Chapter and Brief Respond are, as explained in Lesson Four, "accidental" parts of the Office. Accordingly, on feasts, they should be taken from the Proper or, if none are given there, from the appropriate Common.

The Preces

If and only if the Preces have been said at Lauds of the same day, the Preces are then said (A35).

The Salutation, Bidding and Collect

Following the Preces or, if they have been omitted, the Brief Respond, the Salutation ("The Lord be with you," etc. or "Lord, hear my prayer," etc.) is said, followed by the Bidding ("Let us pray") and the Collect of the Day, found in the Proper (i.e., the principal Collect used at Lauds).

No commemorations of any kind are made in the diurnal Hours.

The Closing Versicles and Final Our Father

Terce, Sext and None are each ended with the Closing Versicles (A7) and a final Our Father said silently.

Peculiarities of the Day Office

There are fewer changeable elements at Terce, Sext and None than, for instance, at Matins. The Psalms with their antiphon are variable, but usually come from the weekly Psalter. The Chapter and Brief Respond usually come from the Ordinary on feriae and Sundays, and from the Proper or appropriate Common on feasts.

Nevertheless, the day Hours have several unique aspects. First, the three Psalms are buttressed about by one antiphon as a group, instead of each Psalm having an antiphon. This antiphon is never "doubled," i.e. it is always said up to the dagger before the Psalms and in full after them. This phenomenon is similar to that in Compline.

Second, the antiphon for their Psalms is sometimes taken from those used at Lauds. When this occurs, either through an explicit rubric or, when using the appropriate Common for a feast it becomes clear that specific antiphons for the day Hours are not given, Terce uses the second antiphon of Lauds, Sext the third, and None the fifth (the fourth antiphon at Lauds is omitted). For example, when using Common 9 on the feast of a Confessor (F95), the Common does not provide proper antiphons for Terce. However, the antiphons in the weekly Psalter cannot be used because of the day's festal character. In such a case, the second antiphon of Lauds (F94) is used.

Similarly, when no Little Chapter is given for Terce, the Chapter from Lauds is used. Again, see F95 for an example. Since Common 9 does not give a proper Little Chapter at Terce, when the Office of a Confessor is said, the Chapter from Lauds (F94) is used at Terce.

Concluding Thoughts

With some practice, the diurnal Hours will be found to be easier and simpler in structure than the Major Hours, or Compline. They can serve as a way of briefly recollecting ourselves in God at various points throughout our work-day. Even if only one day Hour is recited, such as Sext, their importance in the scheme of the Divine Office and in our daily sanctification should not be overlooked.

Lesson Eleven: Prime -- The Odd Hour

Prime is here called the "odd" hour because it is unlike any of the other Hours of the Divine Office. Along with Compline, it was the latest in development, designed to be recited in one's chamber immediately upon rising. Later, Prime was brought into communal recitation when it was joined to the "Chapter Meeting," or daily meeting of those in a particular monastic community. Prime is now composed not only of the office proper, but of a "capitular office" which is built around this meeting.

Thus Prime exhibits a strange combination of elements, some of a domestic flavor, and others of a communal nature. It also, like Compline, has few changeable elements. As one of the Lesser Hours, it is brief in duration and suited to private morning recitation.

Structure of Prime

- [Prayer Before the Office (A Section), if first office recited that day];
- The Triple Prayer (Our Father, Hail Mary and Apostles Creed) (A Section);
- The Opening Versicles (A Section);
- The Hymn (A26);
- The Psalms (e.g., from weekly Psalter);
- The Little Chapter and Brief Respond (A27-A28);
- The Preces (A29);
- The Salutation, Bidding, and Collect of the Office (A30);
- The Closing Versicles (A30);
- The Capitular Office
- Opening Prayers (A31);
- The Benediction and Brief Lesson (A31-A32);
- Final Blessing (A32);
- Final Our Father

The Hymn

The Hymn at Prime is always taken from A26, but its doxological ending may be changed for certain feasts and seasons as given on A5.

The Psalms

The three Psalms at Prime are taken from the appropriate day in the weekly Psalter, or occasionally from the Proper or the appropriate Common if the rubrics of the day so direct.

The Psalms are said under one antiphon, meaning that the antiphon is recited, followed by all Psalms as a group (each ending with the Gloria Patri), followed by the antiphon in full.

When Lauds 2 (the penitential form of Lauds, beginning with Psalm 51) is said, Prime is recited

with a fourth Psalm as set forth in the weekly Psalter.

The antiphon at Prime is usually from the weekly Psalter, but in certain seasons it is found on A26-A27. Of course, if at any time the Proper of the day provides an antiphon or directs to a particular Common, that antiphon should be used. On some saints' days, the antiphon will be taken from those used for Lauds, as explained below.

The Little Chapter and Brief Respond

The Little Chapter is found on A27, and is always followed by "Thanks be to God."

The Brief Responds are set forth on A27-A28, and the first is changed with a proper versicle on certain feast days. A table of such versicles is on A28.

The Preces

The Preces on A29 are always said unless a feast of double rite is celebrated or commemorated, during days within Octaves, or on certain other days as explained in the rubric on A29.

Otherwise, the Preces are recited in "ferial" or "dominical" fashion. "Ferial" Preces are simply the Preces on A29, recited kneeling. The "ferial" Preces are said when the Preces have been recited at Lauds (i.e., on penitential days).

The "dominical" Preces are recited standing, and in abridged format as explained on A29. Both forms of the Preces continue with additional versicles and the General Confession as on A30.

The Salutation, Bidding and Collect

Following the Preces or, if they have been omitted, the Brief Respond, the Salutation ("The Lord be with you," etc. or "Lord, hear my prayer," etc.) is said, followed by the Bidding ("Let us pray") and the Collect of the Office (A30).

Following the Collect, modified closing versicles are said as on A30.

The Capitular Office

Immediately after these closing versicles, the Capitular Office is recited. It is praiseworthy, although not required, to read the day's entry in the Martyrology prior to this office. This reading, recited prior to the Chapter Meeting in religious houses, lists those Christians martyred on this day throughout history. The Roman Martyrology in effect prior to Vatican II is entirely appropriate for use here where it may be had.

The Capitular Office begins with the unchanging prayers on A31, through and including the Collect.

It continues with the Brief Lesson, preceded by the Benediction on A31. The Brief Lessons are given in table format on A31-A32, but on feasts the Brief Lesson is the Little Chapter from the Office of None. (See rubric on A32). The Brief Lesson, like the lessons of Matins, is always followed by "V. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us. R. Thanks be to God."

After the Brief Lesson is said the versicles and Benediction on A32, followed by a final Our Father said silently. The Benediction is to be recited by the "foremost," which is the clergyman of highest dignity present, the senior clergyman in groups of equal rank, or the master or mistress of the house in a group composed of laymen.

Peculiarities of Prime

Like the Day Hours, the Psalms at Prime are buttressed about by one antiphon as a group, instead of each Psalm having an antiphon. This antiphon is never "doubled," i.e. it is always said up to the dagger before the Psalms and in full after them. This phenomenon is similar to that in Compline.

Second, the antiphon for the Psalms at Prime is sometimes the first antiphon from Lauds of the same Office.

This occurs either through an explicit rubric or, when using the appropriate Common for a feast it becomes clear that a specific antiphon for Prime is not given.

Concluding Thoughts

Prime is unlike any other Hour of the Divine Office, and despite most of its elements being found in the Ordinary, it is sufficiently affected by the day in question (i.e., whether a feast is celebrated, whether it is of double rite, etc.) that it is necessary to have mastered issues of Rite and Rank prior to learning it.

However, like the Day Hours, Prime can serve as a way of briefly recollecting ourselves in God at our rising or after breakfast. On the other hand, because it is the one Hour most strongly influenced by the monastic tradition, many find it odd to recite in private devotion. For those not under obligation to recite the Office, Prime may certainly be omitted in favor of other Hours more suited to individual recitation.

Lesson Twelve: The Great Triduum

[Adapted slightly from instructions on the Great Triduum prepared by an pseudonymous rubricist, "Anglican Jedi," whose work is greatly appreciated.]

The Great Triduum commences with the Office of Matins of Maundy Thursday, anticipated on the evening of Wednesday in Holy Week. The Triduum ends with None of Holy Saturday. During this period, no feast may be celebrated or commemorated.

The Office of the Great Triduum, like the Office of the Dead, reflects the Office as it was in the earliest days of its development.

While at first glance, the Offices of the Sacred Triduum may seem simpler than normal, due to the lack of many of the "bells and whistles," it is in fact imperative that an understanding of the rubrics for the Triduum be mastered.

Issues Common to the Entire Triduum

Elements Omitted from the Office

- The Opening Versicles
- The Invitatory
- Hymns
- Gloria Patri
- Brief Chapters
- Responsories
- The Salutation
- The Closing Versicles
- The Marian Antiphons

The Collect

The Collect during the Triduum is the same for every Office, except for the ending, which is said silently by the Officiant.

Psalm 51

This psalm is said after the Benedictus at Lauds of Maundy Thursday, and is repeated in every Office until and including None of Holy Saturday.

Psalm 51 is said with its own antiphon, "Christ for our sake, etc.," which is made longer with each of the three days.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday is the Feast of the Institution of the Eucharist, though this is not really

emphasized in the day's office.

Matins and Lauds ("Tenebrae")

The Office is straight from the Proper (C288-303), and is almost a stripped-down version of the ordinary office, until the Benedictus.

When said solemnly and in choir, the Office is known as Tenebrae, whose hallmark is the extinguishing of fifteen candles.

After the beginning of the Benedictus, the altar Candles are extinguished; after the conclusion, the last candle on the candlestick is removed, and hidden behind the altar, to be replaced after a loud noise and the Collect.

Psalm 51 is said, with its antiphon, "Christ for our sake, etc." On Maundy Thursday, the antiphon is said in its shortest form.

After the Psalm and antiphon are said, the Collect of the Triduum is said, with ending said silent by the celebrant.

The Other Hours

At Prime, the Psalms of "Prime 1" of Sunday are said. The Martyrology is omitted, as is everything following, until the end of the capitular office.

On this day, when the Office is said in choir, Vespers is said after the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament to the Altar of Repose, and before the Maundy.

Vespers begins immediately after the Dual Prayer, with its Psalms, followed by the Magnificat and Psalm 51 and so forth, as at Lauds.

Compline begins with the Confession and Absolution, followed by the Psalms, after which is said Nunc Dimittis is said, followed by Psalm 51 and so forth, as at Lauds.

Good Friday

The Office is said as in the proper, with much of the same rubrics as for Maundy Thursday.

The Mass of the Presanctified follows Sext on Good Friday.

The Holy Sabbath

The Office is said as on the previous two days, except as below.

At Lauds, the Psalms are those of "Lauds 2" of Saturday, except for the Canticle, which is in the proper.

At Prime through None, the Office is identical to that of Maundy Thursday.

Strictly speaking, there is no full I Vespers of Easter; Rather, it is the concluding rite of the Easter Vigil, and is set forth in the Proper.

Compline is said as usual through the year, except the Psalms, which are of Sunday, are said without antiphon.

From I Vespers of Easter onward throughout Eastertide, there is no kneeling in any of the Office, save during the Prayers Before and After the Office.

Concluding Thoughts

Careful attention should be paid to the rubrics on C288. They provide explanation of the peculiarities of the Office, and may be referred to during the Triduum as often as needed.