

A Beginner's Guide to Liturgy of the Hours (Four Volume)

The Liturgy of the Hours is the public and communal prayer of the Catholic Church. It is considered to be one of the first duties of the Bride of Christ.

The Catholic Church teaches us that the Liturgy of the Hours is *like an extension of the Eucharistic Celebration* (CCC, 1178), *accomplishes our sanctification* (GILH, 14), *permeates and transfigures the time of each day* (CCC, 1174), *reaches all of humanity and contributes greatly to the salvation of the world* (GILH, 27), and *unites our praise to that of Christ and all His angels and saints in heaven* (GILH, 15-16).

In the year 2000, in his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Inuente*, Pope St John Paul II said it was time for the Church to “put out into the deep.” He expressed his concern for Christians who had become content with a shallow prayer that was unable to fill their whole life. He said that in today’s world, such Christians would be “Christians at risk.”

He then insisted that the Church “become distinguished in the art of prayer” and that greater pastoral care be devoted to “promoting the Liturgy of the Hours as the prayer of the whole people of God.”

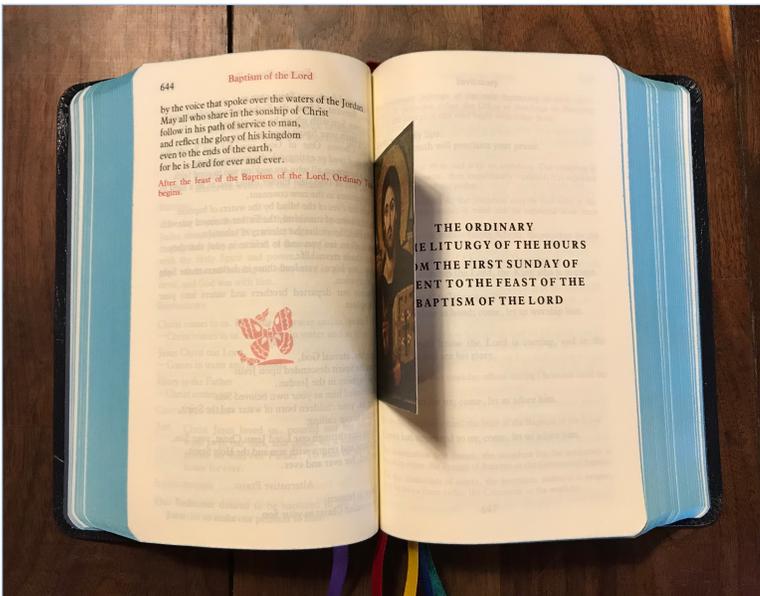
May this guide serve as an aid to help you become distinguished in the art of praying the Liturgy of the Hours, the prayer that is able to fill your whole life and plunge you into the deep of God’s strong and enduring love!

While there are other approved versions of the Divine Office, the Liturgy of the Hours is the most commonly known and practiced throughout the Roman Catholic Church. You can find a single volume *Christian Prayer* book which contains *Morning*, *Evening*, and *Night Prayer* along with an abbreviated section for *Office of Readings* and *Daytime Prayer*. However, this is a guide for the complete 4-volume set of the Liturgy of the Hours.

Let's begin our walk-through...

First, it should be noted that in Volume I (for the Advent & Christmas Seasons), you can find the *General Instructions of the Liturgy of the Hours* at the very beginning on page 21. This short document provides a theological overview of the Liturgy of the Hours along with a guide for understanding the various components that make up the prayer.

Once you locate the General Instructions, you will want to place a bookmark in what is called the *Ordinary* found on page 647 (Volume I)¹. **The Ordinary includes basic instructions for praying the various hours throughout the day.**



In the *Ordinary* you will find that some words are in black while others are in red. **The words printed in red are instructions. The words printed in black are the prayers that you actually pray.** It is a good idea to spend some time in the *Ordinary* to become familiar with these basic instructions.

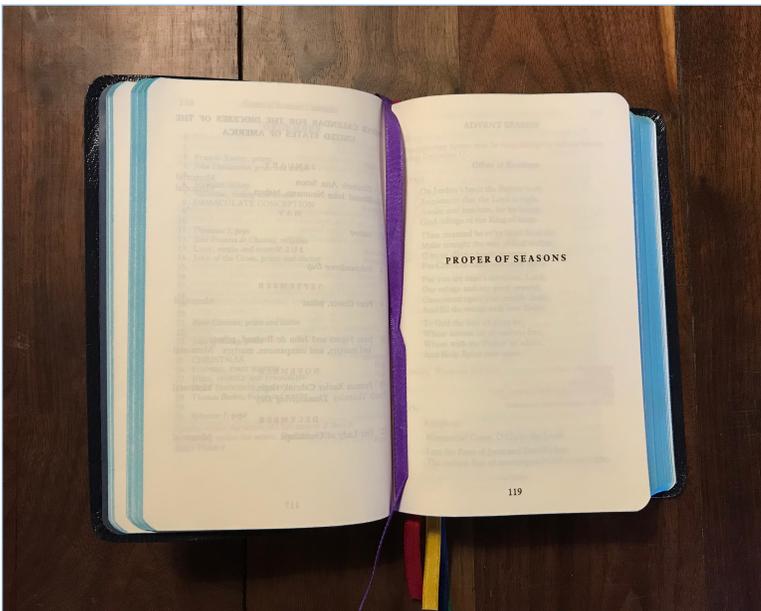
It is also important to note that the *Ordinary* has prayers that are repeated each day such as the *Invitatory*, the *Canticle of Zechariah* and the *Canticle of Mary*. The *Invitatory* is prayed prior to *Office of Readings* or *Morning Prayer* (whichever is prayed first). The *Canticle of Zechariah* is prayed during *Morning Prayer*, and the *Canticle of Mary* is prayed during *Evening Prayer*.

¹ The Ordinary can be found in each volume before the Psalter.

Now on to the ribbons...

You will want to place your **FIRST RIBBON** towards the front in a section called the **PROPER OF SEASONS**. Prayers for the *Proper of Seasons* begin on page 137 (Volume I)² and contains all the prayers according to the “seasons” of the Church: *Advent/Christmas* (Volume I), *Lent/Easter* (Volume II), and *Ordinary Time* (Volumes III & IV). Find the page that corresponds to the current week of the Liturgical Year and place this ribbon there.

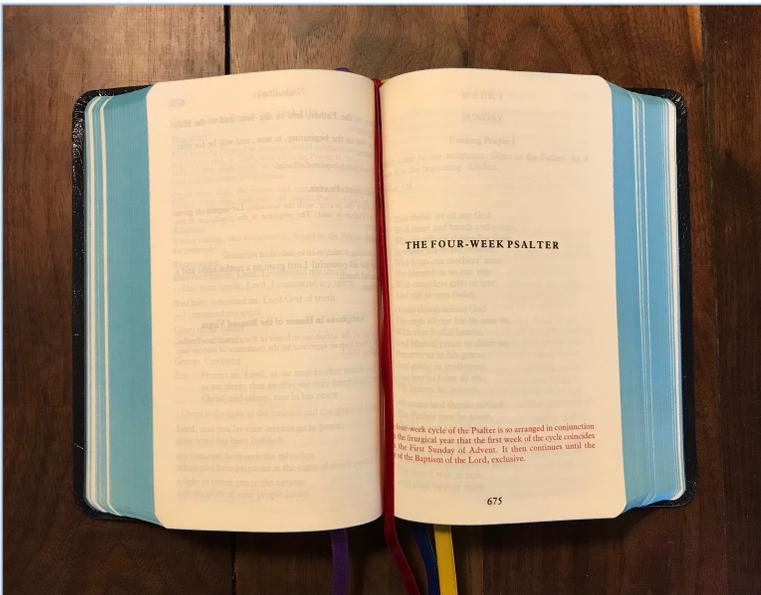
In this section you will find the *Readings, Responsories* and *Concluding Prayers* for the *Office of Readings* for each day of the year. During *Ordinary Time*, you will turn to the *Proper of Seasons* for *antiphons* and *concluding prayers* for *Morning Prayer* and *Evening Prayer* on Sundays. In addition to Sundays, during the seasons of *Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter* (Volumes I & II), you will also find *readings, responsories, antiphons, intercessions, and concluding prayers* that are proper for each day of the week.



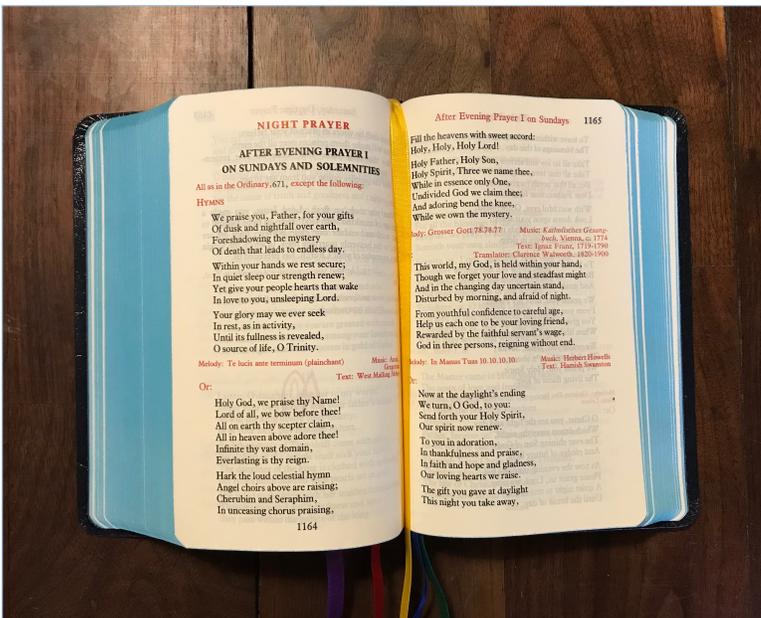
Place the **SECOND RIBBON** in middle of the prayer book in the **PSALTER** that corresponds to the current week in the Liturgical year. The four-week *Psalter* begins with Week 1 (Sunday Evening Prayer I) on page 677 (Volume I)³. If you ever wonder which week of the *Psalter* we are currently using, you can find that under the heading for each week of the Liturgical Calendar in the *Proper of Seasons*. Each day in the four week *Psalter* will provide antiphons and Psalms for the *Office of Readings, Morning, Midday, and Evening Prayers*.

² Prayers in the Proper of Seasons begin on page 30 in Volume II, page 31 in Volume III, and page 53 in Volume IV

³ Psalter begins on 1075 in Volume II, 677 in Volume III, and 641 in Volume IV



Set your **THIRD RIBBON** to the current day for **NIGHT PRAYER**. *Night Prayer* is a great way to start praying the Liturgy of the Hours, because it is only a one-week cycle (versus the four-week cycle of Psalms for *Office of Readings, Morning, Midday, and Evening Prayers*). The first day for *Night Prayer* can be found immediately after the four-week *Psalter* on page 1164 (Volume I)⁴. Consult the *Ordinary* for basic instructions for praying *Night Prayer*. You can also use this ribbon for praying the complimentary Psalms for *Daytime Prayer* as well. These are found in each volume between *Night Prayer* and *Proper of Saints*.

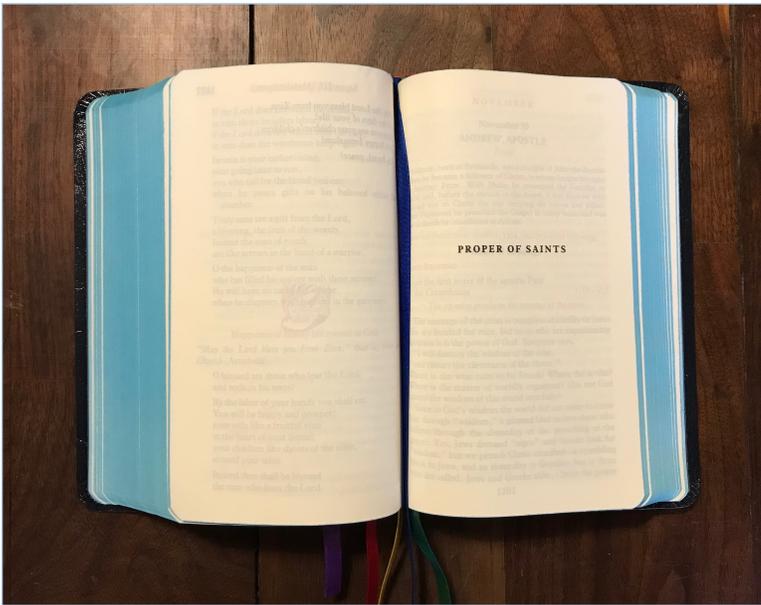


Your **FOURTH RIBBON** should be placed in the section entitled **PROPER OF SAINTS** beginning on page 1201 (Volume I)⁵. The *Proper of Saints* contains special prayers and *antiphons* for memorials and feast

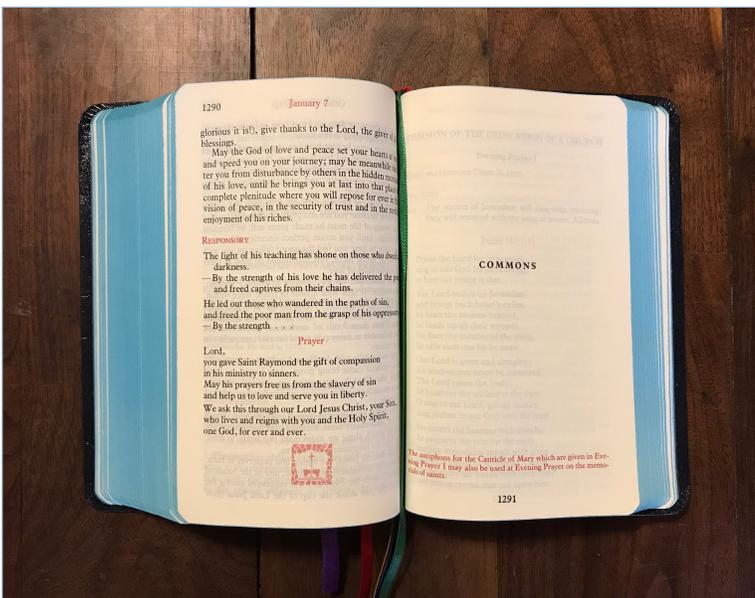
⁴ Night Prayer can be found on page 1619 in Volume II, 1264 in Volume III, and 1228 in Volume IV

⁵ Prayers for the Proper of Saints begins on page 1661 in Volume II, 1301 in Volume III, and 1201 in Volume IV

days throughout the calendar year. For this section all you need to know is the calendar date to know where to put the ribbon.



Lastly, place your **FIFTH RIBBON** in the section titled **COMMONS** which immediately follows the *Proper of Saints* (page 1291 in Volume I)⁶. These are specific Psalms, readings, and prayers that can be used on memorials and feast days. In the *Proper of Saints* you will find the *Commons* along with their page numbers that can be used for particular memorials and feast days.



Congratulations! Now that you have all of ribbons in place, let's go over some basic instructions for the prayers...

⁶ Commons begin on page 1877 in Volume II, 1581 in Volume III, and 1595 in Volume IV

Basic Instructions | Office of Readings

First, while the other hours of the day should be prayed “at a time which most clearly corresponds with its true canonical time” (GILH, 11), the Office of Readings can be prayed at any time of the day. However, if it is prayed prior to Morning Prayer it begins:

† *Lord, open my lips.*

And my mouth will proclaim your praise.

† *Sign of the Cross is made over your mouth*

This is then followed by the *Invitatory Antiphon* (found in the current day of the *Psalter*, the *Ordinary*, the *Proper of Saints*, or the *Commons*) and the *Invitatory Psalm*, which is found in the *Ordinary* on page 648 (Volume I)⁷.

Following the *Invitatory Psalm* a hymn is sung. An appropriate hymn be selected from any day in the *Psalter*, the *Proper of Seasons*⁸, *Proper of Saints*, or the *Commons*.

After the hymn, *Antiphon 1* is said followed by the *Psalm*. At the end of the *Psalm*, you will always pray the “*Glory to the Father...*” If there is a *Psalm Prayer*, you will pray that after the “*Glory to the Father...*” and then repeat the *antiphon*. If there is not a *Psalm Prayer*, just repeat the *antiphon* after the “*Glory to the Father...*”. This will be the format for the remaining *Psalms* as well.

After the *Psalms*, a verse is said before the reading. The *first reading* is then read followed by a *responsory*. The second reading is then read followed by another *responsory*. Finally, the *concluding prayer* is prayed along with the conclusion:

† *Let us praise the Lord.*

And give Him thanks.

On Sundays and solemnities the *Te Deum* is prayed prior to the concluding prayer. This is found in the *Ordinary*.

Basic Instructions | Morning and Evening Prayer

First, *Morning* and *Evening Prayer* always begin with

† *God, come to my assistance.*

Lord, make haste to help me.

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

*as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia*⁹

⁷ *Invitatory Psalm* is found on page 1044 in Volume II, 649 in Volume III, and 613 in Volume IV

⁸ (Volumes II & III have hymns at the beginning of the *Proper of Seasons* related to the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent & Easter)

This ought to be followed by a hymn. An appropriate hymn can be selected from any day in the Psalter, the Proper of Seasons, Proper of Saints, or the Commons.

After the hymn, *Antiphon 1* is said followed by the Psalm. At the end of the Psalm, you will always pray the “*Glory to the Father...*” (with the exception of the canticle in Sunday Morning Prayer Week I). If there is a *Psalm Prayer*, you will pray that after the “*Glory to the Father...*” and then repeat the *antiphon*. If there is not a *Psalm Prayer*, just repeat the *antiphon* after the “*Glory to the Father...*”. This will be the format for the remaining Psalms as well.

After the Psalms, there will be a reading from Sacred Scripture¹⁰. This will then be followed by a *Responsory* and the *Gospel Cantic* (*Cantic of Zechariah* for *Morning Prayer* and *Cantic of Mary* for *Evening Prayer*). The *Gospel Canticles* can be found in the *Ordinary*. As with the Psalms, the *canticles* are preceded by the *antiphon* and followed by a “*Glory to the Father...*” and the *antiphon*. Note that the sign of the cross is made as you begin the *Gospel Cantic*

The *Intercessions* are then prayed.

Morning and *Evening Prayer* conclude with the *Our Father*, a *Concluding Prayer*, and a prayer for God’s blessing:

† *May the Lord bless us,
protect us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life.
Amen.*

Basic Instructions | Daytime Prayer

The four-week Psalter contains Psalms for one of the daytime hours for each day. If you pray more than one of the daytime hours, you can find the *Complementary Psalmody* containing Psalms for Mid-morning, Mid-day, and Mid-afternoon hours immediately following *Night Prayer*.

Daytime Prayer always begin with

† *God, come to my assistance.
Lord, make haste to help me.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia*

This ought to be followed by a hymn. An appropriate hymn can be selected from any day in the *Psalter*, the *Proper of Seasons*, *Proper of Saints*, or the *Commons*.

⁹ Alleluia is omitted during Lent

¹⁰ Remember that during Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter (Volumes I & II), the Reading from Sacred Scripture and following will be found in the Proper of Seasons.

When praying Daytime Prayer during Ordinary Time (Volumes III & IV)

After the hymn, *Antiphon 1* is said followed by the Psalm. At the end of the Psalm, you will always pray the “*Glory to the Father...*” If there is a *Psalm Prayer*, you will pray that after the “*Glory to the Father...*” and then repeat the *antiphon*. If there is not a *Psalm Prayer*, just repeat the *antiphon* after the “*Glory to the Father...*” This will be the format for the remaining Psalms as well. After the antiphon and Psalms, you then continue with the *Reading*, *Responsory*, and *Concluding Prayer*, each of which is provided in the current day of the *Psalter*.

When praying Daytime Prayer during Advent, Christmas, Lent, or Easter (Volumes I & II)

After the hymn, you will pray the *Antiphon* from the *Proper of Seasons*. Because only one antiphon is provided, that antiphon is prayed prior to the first Psalm and after the last Psalm. An antiphon is *not* prayed in between the Psalms. Following the antiphon and Psalms, you will once again turn to the *Proper of Seasons* to find the *Reading*, *Responsory* and *Concluding Prayer*.

Following the *Concluding Prayer*, Daytime Prayer ends with:

† *Let us praise the Lord.*
And give Him thanks.

Basic Instructions | Night Prayer

Night Prayer always begin with

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

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

Following the Introduction, a brief examination of conscience may be made. When celebrating communally, the *Penitential Rite* from Mass may be used following the examination of conscience.

After the examination of conscience and penitential rite, a hymn can be selected. These are provided in each volume at the beginning of the *Night Prayer* section.

After the hymn, an *antiphon* is said followed by the Psalm. At the end of the Psalm, you will always pray the “*Glory to the Father...*” and then repeat the *antiphon*. This will be the format for additional Psalms as well.

After the Psalms, there will be a short reading from Sacred Scripture. This will then be followed by a *Responsory* and the *Canticle of Simeon*. The *Gospel Canticle* can be found in the *Ordinary*. As with the Psalms, the *canticle* is preceded by the *antiphon* and followed by a “*Glory to the Father...*” and the *antiphon*. Note that the sign of the cross is made as you begin the *Gospel Canticle*.

The *Concluding Prayer* is then prayed followed by the blessing, “*May the all-powerful Lord grant us a restful night and a peaceful death*” (this can be found in the *Ordinary*). Lastly, an antiphon of the Blessed Virgin Mary may be said. These can be found at the end of the Night Prayer section.

Remember, if you ever get lost or confused, go to the *Ordinary*, which can be found immediately before the Psalter, and it will tell you what to do.

If you are attempting to pray the Liturgy of the Hours for the first time, be patient. Learning the public and communal prayer of the Church is a challenge. The psalmist identifies our offering to God in prayer as a *sacrifice* of praise, a *sacrifice* of joy, and a *sacrifice* of thanksgiving.

However, this is not just any sacrifice. It is a sacrifice united with Jesus Christ and his perfect offering to the Father. Therefore, the graces received through praying the Liturgy of the Hours accomplish more for our personal growth in holiness, the good of the Church, and the salvation of the world than we could ever ask or imagine.

If you ever have any questions, please do not hesitate to e-mail us at info@liturgyofthehours.org or call us at (814) 676-1910. You can also find all the page numbers you need for praying Morning and Evening Prayer on our website at liturgyofthehours.org/todays-pages