


Written in an engaging style that is both conversational and informative, *Inwardly Digest* is a timely invitation to life in the Spirit sustained by the patterns and rhythms of the Prayer Book.

—FRANK GRISWOLD
25th Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church




With the spiritual foundation in *The Book of Common Prayer*, Derek Olsen shows how everyday Christians can grow closer to God through a “training regimen” that incorporates the spirituality of Anglican liturgy as a daily practice. In straightforward and accessible writing, Olsen provides a guide to Prayer Book spirituality for everyone.

—THE REV. SUSAN BROWN SNOOK
Episcopal priest and editor of *Acts to Action: The New Testament’s Guide to Evangelism and Mission*



INWARDLY DIGEST
THE PRAYER BOOK AS GUIDE TO A SPIRITUAL LIFE



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CHAPTER 5

THE ESSENCE OF THE DAILY OFFICE

The Calendar gives us the big picture—the year is the grand cycle. The Daily Office, on the other hand, is the smallest liturgical cycle, giving shape to our hours and days. If the Calendar and collects help us see the full arc of salvation history, the Daily Office helps us see the life of faith as a daily activity that must be consistently chosen from among a hundred other things all clamoring for our time and attention. This is devotion as the constant daily practice of the faith.

Just as a runner is someone who gets out there every day—or at least several times a week—and pours some sweat on the pavement, so too someone who is formed by the liturgy and the Daily Office has to consistently choose it day after day, not just once in a while as the mood strikes. The Office is a discipline. To be formed by it requires constancy and dedication—but it is well worth the effort.

The essence of the Daily Office must be found on one hand in Paul's exhortation for Christians "with gratitude in your hearts [to] sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Colossians 3:16), and, on the other hand, to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The two central themes here

are the use of songs and poetic praises offered to God and that continuous prayer springs from deliberate acts of prayer. As we consider the Daily Office and its various parts and acts, we will return time and time again to these two basic principles that form its foundation.

PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS

In her book, *Worship*, Evelyn Underhill, an Anglican mystic of the twentieth century, reinforces the poetic character of the Daily Office and the significance of that quality:

Liturgical worship shares with all ritual action the character of a work of art. Entering upon it, we leave the lower realism of daily life for the higher realism of a successive action which expresses and interprets eternal truth by the deliberate use of poetic and symbolic material. A liturgical service should therefore possess a structural unity; its general form and movement, and each of its parts, being determined by the significance of the whole. By its successive presentation of all the phases of the soul's response to the Holy, its alternative use of history and oratory, drama and rhythm, its appeals to feeling, thought, and will, the individual is educated and gathered into the great movement of the Church. . . . Nevertheless since its main function is to suggest the supernatural and lead men out to communion with the supernatural, it is by the methods of poetry that its chief work will be done. . . . [P]oetry still remains a chief element at least in the Daily Office, which is mainly an arrangement of psalms, canticles, and scripture readings.¹

She goes on to remind us of the interpretive errors that occur when we attempt to read poetry literally and miss its deeper sense and direction. As she sees it, poetry in the liturgy has three main purposes:

- (1) It is the carrying-medium of something which otherwise wholly eludes representation: the soul's deep and awestruck apprehension of the numinous. . . .
- (2) It can universalize particulars; giving an eternal reference to those things of time in and through which God speaks to men. . . .
- (3) It is a powerful stimulant of the transcendental sense. . . .

All these characters of poetry are active in good liturgy, and indeed constitute an important part of its religious value. Moreover, poetry both enchants and informs, addressing its rhythmic and symbolic speech to regions of the mind which are inaccessible to argument, and evoking movements of awe and love which no exhortation can obtain. It has meaning at many levels, and welds together all those who use it; overriding their personal moods and subduing them with a grave loveliness.²

Great art—great poetry—captures our minds and hearts and suffuses reality with a new light, a new perspective. It helps us see our ordinary, everyday world as not so ordinary and cracks open everyday reality to help us see the beauty, glory, and wonder that is concealed within it. It helps us see new possibilities; it helps us see grander movements.

Like great poetry, scripture invites us into a different way of seeing the world and our relationships within it. It invites us to experience the whole cosmos arrayed around the throne of God as portrayed in the heavenly throne-room of Revelation 4-6 and leads us to speculate about what it means to live in a world where justice, mercy, and loving-kindness are fundamental guiding principles. We are invited to recognize our own world transformed and suffused with the light of God. We function as mirrors, lenses, and crystals, reflecting—focusing—diffusing—the divine light, casting it through our facets upon the world and the people around us.

With its language of poetry, the Daily Office reminds us of and orients us to this understanding and reflection. It also can help us move beyond a literalism and dogmatism that can either frustrate or limit our sense of the holy and the divine. The Athanasian Creed can be a hard pill for many to swallow. On the one hand, it is chock full of complicated and philosophical technical terms. On the other, it ends with a declaration of damnation with a certainty that seems to arrogate to itself a judgment properly left with God alone. The Episcopal Church has never been comfortable with it. Bishop Samuel Seabury, the first American Episcopal bishop, wrote that he was never convinced of the propriety of reading it in church, yet he did want to include it along the same lines as the Articles of Faith to show that we hold the common faith of the West. Indeed, the 1979 revision is the only American prayer book to include it. Especially as modern people, we don't know what to do with it—but the monks did. They sang it as a canticle complete with antiphons at the Morning Prayer service of Prime on Sundays, the poetic and musical setting potentially subverting its dogmatism and softening its philosophical formality in song.

After speaking of the eight individual Hours that formed the classical Daily Office in the West, Underhill draws them together and unites them with their purpose:

The complete Divine Office, then, . . . is best understood when regarded as a spiritual and artistic unity; so devised, that the various elements of praise, prayer, and reading, and the predominantly poetic and historic material from which it is built up, contribute to one single movement of the corporate soul, and form together one single act of solemn yet exultant worship. This act of worship is designed to give enduring and impersonal expression to eternal truths; and unite the here and now earthly action of the Church with the eternal response of creation to its origin. It

is her "Sacred Chant," and loses some of its quality and meaning when its choral character is suppressed: for in it, the demands of a superficial realism are set aside, in favour of those deeper realities which can only be expressed under poetic and musical forms.³

The more we sing the Office, the more in touch we are with these melodies, harmonies, and rhythms. Yet, even if we are reading the Office alone in our rooms, we can still find the cadences.

On a purely literary level, we can go through the Office step by step and note the presence of poetry and music. The psalms form the heart of the Office. We respond to the scripture readings with canticles, most of which are infused and inspired by the psalms—or songs like them. The suffrages themselves are verses of psalms recombined and related to one another in new ways. The collects and prayers speak in the language of the psalms and scriptures.

As we pray the Office and sing it—whether aloud or in our hearts—we are incarnating the Pauline injunction to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God and to one another. As its poetry becomes more deeply a part of us, as these songs become implanted within our hearts, they lead us to a more beautiful lens for locating God at work in our world.

TO PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

This notion of having the songs and psalms implanted in our hearts and consciousness leads us to the second principle, to pray without ceasing. To learn the meaning of this phrase, we turn our eyes to the Desert Fathers and Mothers, who devoted their entire lives to its meaning.

The legalization of Christianity in Rome during the fourth century brought a flood of converts and triggered a

crisis of spirituality. For decades, Christian authenticity had been bound up with martyrdom; fidelity to the way of the cross was identified with the willingness to die a martyr's death at the hands of a hostile state. With martyrdom waning, where was an earnest Christian to turn?

The answer came in the form of the desert. Christians who sought to embody the commands of scripture sold their possessions, renounced family life, and sought lives of prayer and austerity in the deserts, either on their own or in the company of like-minded souls. This way of life was popularized by bishops and theologians who wrote inspiring accounts of the lives of simple men and women and the spiritual riches they uncovered. Bishops and teachers like Athanasius, Jerome, and John Cassian wrote in detail about the lives and the rigorous spiritual practices of these early monks and the practice flowered into monasticism and has fed the Church spiritually for centuries.

As we sift through the literature of the early monastic movement and the desert saints who founded it, we come back repeatedly to this injunction to pray without ceasing, to pray some form of the Daily Office and the fundamental belief that the use of the Office was the key to praying without ceasing. The characteristic pattern of desert life is captured in Athanasius's brief description of how Saint Antony lived:

The money he earned from his work he gave to the poor, apart from what he needed to buy bread, and he prayed often, for he learned that one should pray to the Lord without ceasing. He also listened attentively to the scriptures so that nothing should slip from his mind. He preserved all the Lord's commandments, keeping them safe in his memory rather than in books.⁴

Note the way that work, prayer, and memorization of the scriptures are interconnected here. This way of life is further

clarified by an episode where a desert hermit was arguing with a group of pietists called the Euchites or Messalians:

Some of the monks who are called Euchites went to Enaton to see Abba Lucius. The old man asked them, "What is your manual work?" They said, "We do not touch manual work but as the Apostle says, we pray without ceasing." The old man asked them if they did not eat and they replied they did. So he said to them, "When you are eating, who prays for you then?" Again he asked them if they did not sleep and they replied they did. And he said to them, "When you are asleep, who prays for you then?" They could not find any answer to give him. He said to them, "Forgive me, but you do not act as you speak. I will show you how, while doing my manual work, I pray without interruption. I sit down with God, soaking my reeds and plaiting my ropes, and I say, 'God have mercy on me; according to your great goodness and according to the multitude of your mercies, save me from my sins [Psalm 51:1,2].'" So he asked them if this were not prayer and they replied it was. Then he said to them, "So when I have spent the whole day working and praying, making thirteen pieces of money more or less, I put two pieces of money outside the door and I pay for my food with the rest of the money. He who takes the two pieces of money prays for me when I am eating and sleeping; so, by the grace of God, I fulfill the precept to pray without ceasing."⁵

This blend of piety and practicality is found throughout this early literature. The life described is filled with basic manual labor—weaving ropes or baskets made from the leaves of the desert palms or scratching out subsistence gardens from rocky soil—suffused with constant prayer. Indeed, the Egyptian monks in particular were famous for prayers that were brief but frequent.

The prayer recited by Abba Lucius is an adaptation of the start of Psalm 51. Reading through the *Life of Antony* and

the description that Athanasius gives of Antony's struggles in spiritual travail, a pattern emerges. At a great turning point in Antony's life, during a struggle with demons that left him both physically and spiritually battered, he retained his faith and focus by ceaselessly chanting, "If they place an encampment against me, yet my heart shall not be afraid" (Psalm 27:3). When people came from the cities, hoping to find him dead, he would pray verses from Psalms 68 and 118. Throughout the literature, the words of the psalms constantly appear in prayers and discussions. In truth, the conversations are full of scripture, but consistently the psalms predominate. The Egyptian brief but frequent prayers that appear in the corpus are almost always drawn from scripture and the psalms. One of the works of Evagrius of Pontus (345-399 CE) consists entirely of one-liners from scripture to be used for prayer in situations organized by the eight vices identified by the desert monks.

For these monks—many of whom were illiterate—scripture came through hearing. Scripture was heard and memorized in the Daily Offices. The foundation of the Office gave them the words they needed to meditate on in the midst of their work and to truly pray without ceasing no matter what they were doing.

Perhaps the preeminent connection between the scriptures, the psalms, and praying without ceasing comes from the second conference on prayer recorded by John Cassian. Abba Isaac says that the whole goal of the monastic way of life can be summed up like this: "This, I say, is the end [goal] of all perfection—that the mind purged of every carnal desire may daily be elevated to spiritual things, until one's whole way of life and all the yearnings of one's heart become a single and continuous prayer."⁶ Cassian's companion, Germanus, asks how this sort of focus can be achieved. The reply from Abba

Isaac is that there is one particular formula for meditation that can secure this result:

The formula for this discipline and prayer that you are seeking, then, shall be presented to you. Every monk who longs for the continual awareness of God should be in the habit of meditating on it ceaselessly in his heart, after having driven out every kind of thought, because he will be unable to hold fast to it in any other way than by being freed from all bodily cares and concerns. Just as this was handed down to us by a few of the oldest fathers who were left, so also we pass it on to none but the most exceptional, who truly desire it. This, then, is the devotional formula proposed to you as absolutely necessary for possessing the perpetual awareness of God: "O God, make speed to save me; O Lord, make haste to help me" [Psalm 70:1].⁷

Yes, this is the line that is used as a verse and response to open each of the prayer Offices. No, that's not an accident.

Cassian makes the explicit connection between the Daily Office and the continuous prayer of the Egyptian monks in his other book, *Institutes*, but he does so by framing it in the midst of one of the disputes about monastic practice. By the end of the fourth century, there were two major centers of monastic practice—the deserts of Egypt and the deserts of Palestine. They had different ways of praying the Daily Office. The Egyptian model was the same format as what appears to have been done in many of the early cathedrals of the period—one public service in the morning and another in the evening. Twelve psalms were sung, then there was a reading from the Old Testament, then one from the New Testament. That was it for the day. The Palestinian model was to gather more frequently. Jerome, writing from his monastery in Bethlehem, advises this:

Farther, although the apostle bids us to “pray without ceasing,” and although to the saints their very sleep is a supplication, we ought to have fixed hours of prayer, that if we are detained by work, the time may remind us of our duty. Prayers, as everyone knows, ought to be said at the third, sixth, and ninth hours, at dawn and at evening... We should rise two or three times in the night and go over the parts of scripture which we know by heart.⁸

He instructs the parents of a young woman dedicated to the Church to train her in the same way: “She ought to rise at night to recite prayers and psalms; to sing hymns in the morning; at the third, sixth, and ninth hours to take her place in the line to do battle for Christ; and lastly to kindle her lamp and to offer her evening sacrifice.”⁹

The Egyptians responded to these alternate prayer practices rather harshly. One characteristic response comes from the Egyptian-trained Epiphanius:

The Blessed Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus, was told this by the abbot of a monastery he had in Palestine, “By your prayers we do not neglect our appointed round of psalmody, but we are very careful to recite [the prayer Offices of] Terce, Sext and None.” Then Epiphanius corrected them with the following comment, “It is clear you do not trouble about the other hours of the day, if you cease from prayer. The true monk should have prayer and psalmody continuously in his heart.”¹⁰

Epiphanius suggested that by having more set hours of the day, the monks were neglecting this continual prayer of the heart and instead were satisfied only to pray when the clock told them it was time to do so. Frankly, this is kind of a cheap shot. An argument could equally be made that since the Palestinian monks were hearing the psalms more, they had better opportunity to memorize them and keep them always

in their hearts—but the (Egyptian) sayings don’t give us the Palestinian abbot’s response!

In light of this argument between the two parties, Cassian tries to take a middle path. After explaining the Egyptian system and before talking about how to pray the day hours, he says:

For, among [the Egyptians as opposed to the monasteries of Palestine and Mesopotamia] the Offices that we are obliged to render to the Lord at different hours and at intervals of time [i.e., the day Offices of Terce, Sext, and None] to the call of the summoner, are celebrated continuously and spontaneously throughout the course of the whole day, in tandem with their work. For they are constantly doing manual labor alone in their cells in such a way that they almost never omit meditating on the psalms and on other parts of scripture, and to this they add entreaties and prayers at every moment, taking up the whole day in Offices that we celebrate at fixed times. Hence, apart from the evening and [morning] gatherings, they celebrate no public service during the day except on Saturday and Sunday, when they gather at the third hour for Holy Communion. For what is offered [freely] is greater than what is rendered at particular moments, and a voluntary service is more pleasing than functions that are carried out by canonical obligation. This is why David himself rejoices somewhat boastfully when he says: “Willingly shall I sacrifice to you.” And: “May the free offerings of my mouth be pleasing to you, Lord.”¹¹

Cassian is, in essence, admitting that the Egyptians have a more perfect practice: the two Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer give the stern Egyptian monks all they need to pray without ceasing for the rest of the day. But then he goes right ahead and tells his monks to pray the additional hours in the middle of the day in Palestinian fashion. The Egyptian way

may be better, but the Palestinian is easier—and is likely better training for those still needing to learn their psalms.

These two groups show us two different ways of using the Daily Office to learn how to pray without ceasing. The Egyptian model is to have only two long Offices with psalms and readings at both. The Palestinian model is to have shorter and more frequent Offices with psalmody, leaving the reading of scripture for the long Office at night. The Palestinian model wins decisively in the West; Benedict expresses in his rule what has become normative in the West: eight liturgical services of prayer with an additional monastic business meeting—Chapter—that itself acquires liturgical material. Indeed, this pattern of frequency in corporate recitation of the Offices gets taken to its extreme in the monasteries of Cluny in France. At one point, the monks spent a full eight hours of the day singing liturgies!

With the creation of *The Book of Common Prayer* at the Reformation, Archbishop Cranmer put the Anglican churches onto the other path. Whereas for centuries the Western Church had followed the Palestinian model, Cranmer turned us back to the Egyptian model. Up until our present book, our Offices had consisted of the same elements as the Egyptian Office: psalms, a reading from the Old Testament, a reading from the New Testament, and prayers, all done twice a day. (The 1979 book gives a “Palestinian” nod with the introduction of Noon Prayer and Compline.)

If prayer without ceasing is our goal (and why shouldn't it be?), we must recall that the Egyptian model is the harder path. In order to fulfill the call, we would be wise to follow that model. Pray the long Offices as they're appointed, but then—throughout the day—make our private prayers “brief but frequent.” Take a verse that strikes you in the morning. Ponder it through the day; make it your prayer. Repeat it to yourself as you sit in silence. Whisper it to yourself as you

work. Roll it around in your mind while you eat. Make it part of your prayer without ceasing.

This, then, is the essence of the Office—to make our spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. By speaking in “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God,” our hearts are lifted and our minds expanded to see a world imbued with God. As we take the words of the psalms and the scriptures into ourselves, we provide ourselves with the basic resources to pray without ceasing. The practice of the Office—whether together or alone—builds up in us the pattern of praise and points us in the way of the habitual recollection of God.

THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

When the Church Fathers spoke of the chief morning and evening services of the Daily Office—Lauds and Vespers in the Western Church—they often did so with reference to the temple sacrifices. A classic example is Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) whose encyclopedic writings formed the basis for most Western treatments of the liturgy for almost a thousand years. In describing Vespers, he writes:

Vespers is the end of the Daily Office and the setting of another daylight. Its solemn celebration is from the Old Testament. It was the custom of the ancients to offer sacrifices and to have aromatic substances and incense burnt on the altar at that time. [David], that hymn-singing witness, performed a royal and priestly Office saying: “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice” (Ps 141:2). (De Eccl. Off., 1.20.1).

Isidore asserts a few things that we need to look at more carefully. First, he finds Vespers in the Old Testament. Second, he clarifies this remark by talking about sacrifices, particularly around the offering of incense. Third, he mentions David, citing a psalm in support of his statements. What is he talking about, and in what sense do we take this?

Looking through the legislation in the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, we find a double reference to what Isidore was describing. Numbers 28:1-8 gives a summary:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Command the Israelites, and say to them: My offering, the food for my offerings by fire, my pleasing odor, you shall take care to offer to me at its appointed time. And you shall say to them, This is the offering by fire that you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs a year old without blemish, daily, as a regular offering. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight also one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour for a grain offering, mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil. It is a regular burnt offering, ordained at Mount Sinai for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. Its drink offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in the sanctuary you shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the LORD. The other lamb you shall offer at twilight with a grain offering and a drink offering like the one in the morning; you shall offer it as an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD.

So—lambs, bread, and wine. This legislation is described again at the end of Exodus 29; Exodus 30 then gives directions for the incense altar right before the Holy of Holies in the inmost part of the temple and states: “Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps in

the evening, he shall offer it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations” (Exodus 30:7-8).

Although these twice daily offerings are described separately, we find them joined together in some of the standard summary statements of priestly activity in the temple. Thus, when King Abijah tries to persuade the people of Israel to join the kingdom of Judah, he argues, “We have priests ministering to the LORD who are descendants of Aaron, and Levites for their service. They offer to the LORD every morning and every evening burnt offerings and fragrant incense, set out the rows of bread on the table of pure gold, and care for the golden lampstand so that its lamps may burn every evening” (2 Chronicles 13:10b-11a). When we think about services in the temple, then, this was a big piece of the daily activity: the twice daily burnt offerings of food and incense. The best description that we have from the time of the temple is in Ecclesiasticus 50:12-21 where the service is described while praising Simon, son of Onias, high priest from around 219-196 BCE. While interesting in its own right, the only point that we need to observe from this description is that it includes a description of the Levites singing a psalm at the time of the sacrifice. This agrees with the much later—and much more comprehensive—description of this ceremony in the *Mishnah* (the third-century, written collection of Jewish oral teaching) where set psalms are appointed for the sacrifices for each day of the week.

To recap: there were daily temple sacrifices at morning and evening where prayers were prayed, psalms sung, and sacrifices performed—both food and incense. This is the Old Testament precedent that Isidore is referring to. I am not suggesting that there is any direct liturgical link between the sacrifices and the Offices, only that the pattern is similar and that common elements are likely due to a Christian appropriation of an Old Testament practice.

These offerings of food, drink, and incense are the type that anthropologists refer to as alimentary offerings. That is, in these sacrifices, the community is feeding the deity. In traditions that include images or statues of the gods, they may be clothed during this time as well. While it is easy to dismiss these offerings as primitive and pointless, to do so misses their deeper meaning. Even in those societies, only the very young or unsophisticated believed that the gods needed these feedings and would perish without them. Indeed, Psalm 50 explicitly mocks this shallow understanding: “If I [the Lord] were hungry, I would not tell you, for the whole world is mine and all that is in it. Do you think I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and make good your vows to the Most High” (50:12-4). Rather, the community is taking some of its common supplies—food, drink, things that people use—and choosing to give them up. The fact that useful (and sometimes even scarce) resources are being exclusively devoted to the deity is a symbol of the community’s dedication to their god. That’s what’s really behind this: These sacrifices are an act of self-dedication showing the material loss the community is willing to incur for the sake of faithfulness to their deity. This kind of sacrifice (and there are other kinds that we’ll talk about later) demonstrates dedication because a limited good is being directed toward the god rather than the well-being of the community (or individual).

Psalm 141, with its spiritualization of the sacrifice, is pointing to something important when the psalmist asks that the prayer itself be considered a substitute for or an act of worship united—though at a distance—with the act of sacrifice: “Let my prayer be set forth in your sight as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (141:2). Even though the psalmist isn’t actually burning lambs, the act of prayer itself reflects an act of sacrifice. A good that is

inherently limited—time itself—is being voluntarily dedicated to God.

Thus, if the morning and evening sacrifices of the temple are seen as acts of communal self-dedication to God, the Morning and Evening Prayers of the Church mirroring these sacrificial acts are also acts of self-dedication. We are voluntarily giving up twenty to thirty minutes to God—time that could be spent doing a hundred, a thousand, other things but instead we choose to spend this most precious resource in the praise of God.

There are two direct links that the Church has appropriated from the Old Testament practice that connect us with the spirit of these sacrifices: the use of psalms and the presence of incense. When we sing the psalms at morning and evening prayer, we are uniting our voices across time not just with the early Anglicans of Cranmer’s day, not just with Isidore’s Spanish monks, but also with the Levites serving God in the Jerusalem temple. We are separated by centuries, yet united in song.

Likewise, when we use incense—and this usually occurs either at formal expressions of public worship or, on the other end of the spectrum, as the act of an individual worshiper praying alone—we use it in direct remembrance of the incense offered to God in the temple ceremonies. We are not trying to recreate the temple sacrifices or to put ourselves under Old Testament ceremonial legislation, of course, but—like the psalms—we offer the incense in spiritual unison with the offerings of God’s people through time. Thus, when incense is used at the Offices, it should be used to cense the altar alone and not the people around it. At this point, we are not using incense as a holy purifier but rather offering it directly to God as a sacrifice in and of itself and as a visual representation of the prayers ascending to God’s throne.

By putting substantial prayer Offices at the hinges of the day—morning and evening—the Church joins its worship spiritually and symbolically with the twice daily sacrifices God commanded the Israelites to perform in scripture. As they did in worship, we too are sacrificing something of value—our time—to God as an act of dedication. When we pray the psalms, say the prayers, and lift up our hands with or without incense, we unite ourselves with the people of God across time and offer our own sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

CHAPTER 6

THE ANATOMY OF THE DAILY OFFICE

THE SERVICES

When we consider the Daily Office—the regular prayer services of the Church and our official public services on all days of the year that aren't holy days—we see that a number of items fall under this heading. They are grouped together at the front of the prayer book:

Rite I (Traditional language)

Concerning the Service (p. 36)

Daily Morning Prayer: Rite One (pp. 37-60)

Daily Evening Prayer: Rite One (pp. 61-73)

Rite II (Contemporary language)

Concerning the Service (p. 74)

Daily Morning Prayer: Rite Two (pp. 75-102)

An Order of Service for Noonday (pp. 103-107)

Concerning the Service (p. 108)

An Order of Worship for the Evening (pp. 109-114)

Daily Evening Prayer: Rite Two (pp. 115-126)

An Order for Compline (p. 127-135)

Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families

[Concerning the Services] (p. 136)

In the Morning (p. 137)

At Noon (p. 138)

In the Early Evening (p. 139)

At the Close of Day (p. 140)

Additional Directions

[Directions]

Morning and Evening Prayer (pp. 141-142)

When there is a Communion (p. 142)

Order of Worship for the Evening (pp. 142-143)

Suggested Canticles at Morning Prayer (p. 144)

Suggested Canticles at Evening Prayer (p. 145)

Psalm 95: Traditional (p. 146)

Let me make a few observations here.

First, a distinction is drawn in the title of some services as “Daily” and others as “An Order.” Four services earn the term Daily: Morning and Evening Prayer in Rites I and II. (The brief devotions receive the term, Daily, as a class rather than individually.) This title reinforces their importance and their place in the Church’s understanding of the liturgical round. The others beginning with “An Order...” are recommended but do not have quite the same stamp of authority or necessity as those identified as Daily.

Second, you can’t actually pray either Morning or Evening Prayer with just the contents of this section. You need at least three other pieces to complete the service. They are:

The Collects for the Church Year

Concerning the Proper of the Church Year (p. 158)

Collects: Traditional

[Collects for Sundays of the Church Year] (pp. 159-185)

Holy Days (pp. 185-194)

The Common of Saints [for Days of Optional Observance] (pp. 195-199)

Various Occasions (pp. 199-210)

Collects: Contemporary

[Collects for Sundays of the Church Year] (pp. 211-236)

Holy Days (pp. 237-246)

The Common of Saints [for Days of Optional Observance] (pp. 246-250)

Various Occasions (pp. 251-261)

The Psalter (pp. 581-808)

Daily Office Lectionary

Concerning the Daily Office Lectionary (pp. 934-935)

[The Lectionary] (pp. 936-995)

Holy Days (pp. 996-1000)

Special Occasions (pp. 1000-1001)

Third, instructions on how to do the services are scattered throughout the book. This can be confusing. The majority of what you need to know can be found in the service itself. However, directions on who should do the service are found in the brief “Concerning the Service” notice found just before the service instructions. Some possible points of confusion are addressed in the “Additional Directions” at the end of the section. Items specific to the psalms and the readings may be found in the notes prefacing the Psalter and the Daily Office Lectionary; clarifications on the Calendar are tucked away among the collects.

Fourth, the Rite II services and the Daily Devotions agree in dividing the day into four chief liturgical sections: Morning, Noon, Evening, and Night. The patristic and medieval churches had their own counts for daily liturgical divisions (6 and 7+1 respectively); we have one as well. The fact that we have one at all hearkens back to the patristic and medieval models, but the fact that the count is less than both of the earlier models reflects our intention that these hours not be burdensome; they ought to be possible for the regular working person—not just a monk or hermit. Four sets of prayer a day may seem like a lot, but they are actually more doable than the alternatives, especially as two of those are recommended rather than required.

When it comes to services that you might experience in churches, Morning and Evening Prayer are the big ones. In my years as an Episcopalian, I've seen Morning and Evening Prayer done in a number of ways in a number of places. Noonday Prayer is less common. I've only experienced it in churches that have a special vocation to keeping the full liturgical round like St. Mary the Virgin, Times Square. It tends to be a small group or individual Office. Compline too tends to be individual or small group due to its nature as a bedtime Office. I have seen it done regularly and publicly only in intentional communities like monasteries or seminaries. It is not uncommon to use Compline to conclude evening church meetings or during multi-day retreats, though. Additionally, there seems to be a growing interest in the use of Compline as a choral experience: Both St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle and Christ Church, New Haven, have well-known Compline services that create a place of chant, candles, and beauty, inviting Christians, seekers, and non-Christians alike to experience Christian liturgy as a place of holiness.

I don't recall ever experiencing an "Order of Worship for Evening." It was an interesting idea with classic roots new to

this prayer book, but it has never generated the interest that its framers hoped.

The Daily Devotions are, by their very nature, not intended to be public church services—these are individual or household liturgies. I honestly can't say how much they are used; I don't hear very much about them around the church. I think that may be a missed opportunity for us. As a father of young children, I am fond of them; they instill the concept of regular prayer but are not too long or burdensome for even young children. Early on, our family adopted the devotion "At the Close of Day" as bedtime prayers for our girls. Since it is short and sweet, both of them had (quite unconsciously) memorized it even before they were able to read. I have frequently thought that a colorful laminated placemat with the text of the devotions "In the Morning" and "In the Early Evening" on either side might be a way to get these devotions into the kitchens and consciousness of families with children.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE OFFICES

The structures of Morning and Evening Prayer closely mirror one another. These twin Offices are meant to complement and reinforce one another. Noonday Prayer and Compline share in the same overall movement as the main Offices, but the elements do not fit together in the same way. Compline, in particular, cleaves closer to models of older liturgies and therefore follows a slightly different logic than the other three. An Order of Worship for the Evening has its own internal structure and possibilities, some of which mirror the Offices, others of which do not—it is doing a different thing and should be considered apart from the other liturgies in this section.

If we put the elements of the four prayer Offices in parallel with one another, common elements emerge. Optional elements are in italics; common elements are in bold:

	Morning Prayer	Noonday Prayer	Evening Prayer	Compline
[Fore-Office]	<i>Opening Sentence</i>		<i>Opening Sentence</i>	Versicles ¹²
	<i>Confession & Absolution</i>		<i>Confession & Absolution</i>	<i>Confession & Absolution</i>
Invitatory & Psalms	Opening Versicles	Opening Versicles	Opening Versicles	Opening Versicles
	Invitatory	<i>Hymn</i>	Invitatory	
	Appointed Psalms	Appointed Psalms	Appointed Psalms	Appointed Psalms
Lessons	OT Scripture Reading		<i>OT Scripture Reading</i>	
	Canticle		Canticle	
	NT Scripture Reading	Scripture [Sentence]	NT Scripture Reading	Scripture [Sentence]
	Canticle		Canticle	<i>Hymn</i>
	Apostles' Creed		Apostles' Creed	
The Prayers				Brief Suffrages
	The Lord's Prayer	The Lord's Prayer	The Lord's Prayer	The Lord's Prayer
	Suffrages		Suffrages	
	Collects	Collects	Collects	Collects
	<i>Hymn</i>		<i>Hymn</i>	Canticle
	Concluding Prayers		Concluding Prayers	
Blessing	Blessing	Blessing	Blessing	

Notice the arc we have here. We start with scripture and move to prayer. One way to make sense of this pattern is that we start with edification and then we move to praise—but that's not the best way to think about it. This is the Office; it's **all** praise! It would be better to say that we begin with praise that reveals and reminds us who God is (and, specifically, who God is for his people through time), then we continue with praise that offers our response to who God is.

The large headings printed in Morning and Evening Prayer divide the Offices into four natural parts that can also be applied to Noonday Prayer and somewhat to Compline. There is no initial heading, which is why I've supplied one, Fore-Office, in the chart. The headings reinforce the character of the arc. The pattern starts with the psalms highlighting their crucial function in the Office ecosystem. Notice that the presence of psalms is never optional. This book of divine praises is the scriptural centerpiece of the Office. Then we move to the scripture readings. I think that the heading, "The Lessons," in Morning and Evening Prayer is an unfortunate choice of words. It reflects a holdover mentality from the early Reformation era that locates worship's purpose in its instructional value. Even "The Readings" would be a better way to label what is about to occur that doesn't prejudice the purpose of these scriptures in the same way that the term lessons does. Then we move to the prayers. We get several different kinds of prayer in these sections but many cut across the four Offices: the Lord's Prayer, suffrages, collects, and blessings. Our prayer is not all of one type, and our Offices lead us through a variety as they school us in the arts of praise.

THE ELEMENTS OF MORNING AND EVENING PRAYER

The Fore-Office

These are the elements of the Fore-Office:

Element	Required?	Variation (if any)
Opening Sentences	Optional	Seasonal/ Occasional
Confession of Sin	Optional	

The Fore-Office elements are, as a group, optional. Their use represents our first theological choice as we begin the Office each day. These initial bits date back to our most Puritan point—the 1552 English prayer book—when we as a Church were wrestling with the great Reformation questions. One of these revolved around the issue of sin and grace, and an answer is framed by way of the Fore-Office. In short, this section originally suggested that due to human sin, we can't even worship God properly without a healthy dose of grace and therefore without confessing our lack of it and need for it.

On the other hand, the ancient opening of Morning Prayer—"O Lord, open our lips" (taken from Psalm 51:16)—was meant literally back in the monastic days; silence would be kept in the monasteries from the end of Compline, the last liturgical words of the day, until the beginning of Morning Prayer. Those ancient opening words were literally the first words spoken each day. To use that opening after a page and a half of talk blunts its force a bit. (As does chatty conversation before Morning Prayer or breakfast table dialogue. I find it harder to apply the lip-opening rationale seriously when I pray the Office at 9 in the morning rather than 6 a.m.)

In any case, the prayer book gives us the freedom to go either way: either begin with confession or begin with lip-opening. It certainly makes sense to use the Confession of Sin on the penitential days, those identified in section 4 of the Calendar as "Days of Special Devotion," but other than that, it's up to you and how much penitence you need that day.

The Opening Sentences

While these used to be a scriptural introduction to penitence (and were all penitential in character), our Opening Sentences now serve to set the mood. Morning Prayer offers a much more extensive selection that allows us to invoke either the liturgical season that we're in or the character of the day; Evening Prayer offers a more limited set (but also allows us to use the Morning options if we prefer).

At Morning Prayer, you'll note that each liturgical season is offered a couple of choices. The idea is that you start from the top and work your way through the sentences as the season progresses. If you choose to use the provided sentences at Evening Prayer, you will see there are eight, which gives us a set to rotate on a weekly basis. Of course, you can always just pick what you like.

The Confession of Sin

When it comes to the Confession of Sin, I have to confess that I'm a fan of the longer exhortation to confession in Morning Prayer in Rite I. The opening lines ground our common purpose in praying the Office together:

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of
Almighty God our heavenly Father,

- to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands,

- to set forth his most worthy praise,
- to hear his holy Word, and
- to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and salvation (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 41).

The Rite II version drops the first of these points, not because we have ceased “to render thanks” but to underscore that the primary purpose of the Office is praise—the direct worship of God not tied to obligations or to a transactional model. That is, while we do need to thank God for his gifts to us, we also want to avoid the implication that we are somehow paying God for miracles with prayer either in advance or after the fact.

Rite I offers the traditional version of the confession while Rite II presents the wording that appears in the Rite II Eucharist. The former confession contains more vibrant imagery concerning our wrongdoing; the image of the lost sheep, in particular, provides a nice resonance with the invitatory psalms in Morning Prayer that compare the congregation to sheep under God’s pastoral guidance. The latter confession is more clearly structured to reflect our twofold duty to love God and neighbor, and to acknowledge our failures in doing so.

The Invitatory and Psalter

These are the elements of the Invitatory and Psalter:

Element	Required?	Variation (if any)
Opening Versicles	Yes	A little
Invitatory Antiphon	Optional	Seasonal
Invitatory	Morning: Yes Evening: Optional	Morning: Seasonal
Appointed Psalms	Yes	Choice of Pattern

This section gives us a great big block of musical material, chiefly psalms, after a short dialogue that gets things going. Most of this material is not optional as it forms one of the great theological centers of the Office. If the Office is a “sacrifice of praise,” then this is a big part of where that offering actually happens.

Opening Versicles

As mentioned above, the Opening Versicles of Morning Prayer (“O Lord, open our lips...”) come from Psalm 51 and as discussed, were literally true in a monastic environment; most orders observed a Great Silence from the end of Compline to the beginning of Matins where no talking was allowed. These words would be the first words spoken in the morning. The Opening Versicles of Evening Prayer (“O God, make speed to save us...”) are from Psalm 70:1 and reflect the breath prayer taught by John Cassian and the Desert Fathers. These are the normal opening versicles of the Offices from before the Reformation. In the English prayer books, they were included at Morning Prayer as well, right after the morning versicles.

The only variation is that the “Alleluia” gets dropped in Lent and Holy Week.

Invitatory Antiphons

The invitatory antiphons are sentences used with the invitatory to communicate a sense of the season or occasion. Morning Prayer has them; Evening Prayer does not. Options are given for seasons and for holy days. (Lesser feasts do not receive their own antiphon and use the appropriate seasonal option.) The first part of the antiphon establishes a sense of the season or event; the second is an invariable call to praise,

“O come, let us adore him,” from Psalm 95:6 (although our present prayer book rendering of this phrase is: “O come, let us worship/bow down”). And, yes, the Christmas hymn, “O Come All Ye Faithful,” is a deliberate riff on the structure of the invitatory antiphon.

We are not given any clear direction as to exactly how the antiphon is to be used with the *Venite* or other Invitatory Psalm. (It is not used with the Christ our Passover as it has its own internal Alleluia antiphon.) There are two common ways to use it. The easiest is simply to use it before and after the psalm. The other and more traditional method is to include it several times within the psalm; the musical settings in the hymnal confirm that this should be done at each section break.

Invitatory

The invitatory is an opening song or psalm that literally invites the worship of God. The prayer book contains five different options for Morning Prayer and a single one for Evening Prayer. Three of the morning options are all shades of the same text, Psalm 95. It is customary to refer to the psalms by the first couple of words in Latin. The monks didn't memorize the numbers, so they simply referred to the opening words. This custom was continued by Cranmer at the Reformation and has stuck. In our case, it's particularly useful because our *Venite*, the first word of Psalm 95, is actually not identical with the psalm. The Rite I *Venite* contains the first seven verses of Psalm 95, then substitutes verses 9 and 13 of Psalm 96 for the condemnatory verses at the end of Psalm 95. The Rite II *Venite* simply omits these verses. However, at points (particularly Fridays in Lent and Friday and Saturday in Holy Week), all of Psalm 95 is appointed. Psalm 100, the *Jubilate*, is also an option and was

historically used when Psalm 95 appeared among the Morning Prayer psalms.¹³ For Easter, the Christ our Passover (*Pascha Nostrum*) is provided. It must be used during Easter Week and may be used for the rest of the Easter season. I prefer to use it throughout the season, as it is a good daily reminder that Easter is fifty days long. The Evening Prayer invitatory is an ancient hymn from the Greek Church, O Gracious Light (*Phos hilaron*). It doesn't need antiphons nor are any provided.

At the heart of the invitatory is an invitation. The appointed texts urge those praying them to worship. Psalm 95 holds such a privileged place because it issues the invitation three times in rapid succession. It opens with a repeated call to worship in verses 1 and 2: “Come let us sing...let us shout for joy...Let us come...and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.” The call repeats in verse 6: “Come, let us bow down.” The other element of Psalm 95 that makes it so attractive is found at the end of verse 7: “Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!” Although this passage logically goes with the next section of the psalm—which gives the rebellion of the people under Moses as an example of what not to do—the Rite II *Venite* ends here. In addition to the call to come and worship, we are reminded to also listen and take heed of what God is telling us. The Rite I *Venite* does not include any of the condemnatory section but includes additional encouragement for praise from Psalm 96 and retains the notion that God is also coming to meet us in our worship.

The *Jubilate* contains these elements as well. It opens with an exhortation to worship: “come before his presence with a song” (Psalm 100:1), and repeats it, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise; give thanks to him and call upon his Name” (Psalm 100:3).

During Easter time, Christ our Passover is Cranmer's compilation of Sarum antiphons drawn from the writings of Paul. The repeated “Alleluia” is its own internal antiphon, so

it doesn't need an invitatory antiphon to accompany it. As appropriate for the resurrection season, this text focuses on the passage from death to life and Christ's victory over the grave. The repetition at the beginning of the second and third sections, "Christ...raised from the dead," and the conclusion with its triumphant, "all shall be made alive," is one of my favorite pieces of the Easter experience.

The Evening Prayer invitatory, O Gracious Light, served as the Eastern Church's lamp-lighting hymn for centuries. In an electric-lit culture, we usually miss the symbolic moment when the day moves from light to dark; this hymn helps remind us. At its heart, this is a simple hymn of praise to Christ as the light of the world that praises the Trinity at the hinge of the day.

The Psalm or Psalms

The appointed psalms come next. As I have said, this is the historical and theological center of the Office, and the next chapter is devoted to exploring the psalms within this context. The main decision is which psalm scheme to adopt. The book gives a choice of two; the first appears in the Daily Office Lectionary while the second is found in the section of the prayer book containing the psalms.

The first option is the lectionary cycle. This cycle spreads out the 150 psalms across seven weeks. The cycle begins on the first week of Advent, the first week after Epiphany, the eighth week after Epiphany (if there should be one), the second week of Easter, with Trinity Sunday and Proper 2, Proper 9, Proper 16, and Proper 23. The earlier iterations of the cycle often are not complete because of a number of proper psalms around Christmas, the length of the Epiphany season, proper psalms for Holy Week and Easter, and on what

Proper the season after Pentecost begins. The last three cycles, though, are only interrupted by occasional holy days.

If you look at the layout of this particular lectionary, a pattern emerges. Psalms were specifically picked for Saturday evening, Sunday morning, and Sunday evening. Next, the many parts of the lengthy Psalm 119 were assigned to Wednesdays, alternating between evening and morning. Then, the remaining psalms were distributed to each week, trying to balance out the number of verses and placing some penitential or passion psalms on Fridays (i.e., Psalms 22, 51, 69, and 88). Psalm 95 falls in the evening—so you don't need to worry about it appearing right after you have used it as the invitatory at Morning Prayer. (Psalm 100, though, falls on Tuesday morning of week six.) The pattern shows that the emphasis is on having appropriate psalms for public worship on Saturday nights and Sundays. In addition to this, provisions are made for dropping verses of psalms or whole psalms that might be deemed offensive or problematic to congregations. On balance, each Office prays just under thirty psalm verses.

The second option is the monthly cycle found within the Psalter itself. Turning to page 585 in *The Book of Common Prayer*, the first page of the Psalter, you'll see a note in italics above the title of Psalm 1: "First Day: Morning Prayer." On page 589 before the start of Psalm 6 is another note: "First Day: Evening Prayer." These notes are given for thirty days, morning and evening. If a month has a thirty-first day, the psalms given for the thirtieth are repeated. On average, this cycle provides about forty-five verses of psalms for each Office. (The longest is the evening of the fifteenth with seventy-three verses; the shortest is the evening of the second with twenty-four. Most counts fall between the high thirties and low fifties, though.)

The monthly cycle highlights the catechetical role of the Office. That is, it emphasizes the continuous repetition of the psalms for the purpose of learning them. It presents a less flexible cycle that is not particularly responsive to seasonal awareness. Most of the people I know who use this cycle (myself among them) only deviate from it for the Principal Feasts. This can lead to unusual combinations when a particular angry psalm might show up on a happy festival or a joyous one occur where it doesn't seem to fit. Often it is in these moments that I learn something important—either about the psalm or the occasion—that had always been present; I just hadn't noticed it before. The odd combination casts the new insight in relief and makes it stand out.

In contrast, the seven-week lectionary covers the psalms but over a longer period. Its strength is that it lends itself to occasional use. That is, the monthly cycle is used best and works best when it is prayed daily. The seven-week cycle neither assumes nor requires a previous discipline. Similarly, using proper psalms for holy days is the better option if a parish that doesn't normally pray the Office together decides to hold an Evensong.

THE LESSONS

These are the elements of the Lessons:

Element	Required?	Variation (if any)
Old Testament Lesson	Morning: Yes Evening: Optional ¹⁴	Daily
Canticle	Yes, if reading	Variable
New Testament Lesson	Yes	Daily
Canticle	Yes	Variable
Apostles' Creed	Yes	None

This section contains the biblical readings and the sung canticles. It concludes with the Apostles' Creed, which reminds us of the Church's interpretive lens for the scriptures.

The Lessons and the Office Lectionary

The Daily Office Lectionary provides for three readings per day over a two-year cycle: an Old Testament reading, an Epistle reading, and a Gospel reading. Both Morning and Evening Prayer can accommodate—and have traditionally had—two biblical readings each for a total of four per day. As a result, you have a choice: You can use the three readings as appointed and distribute them through the Offices (usually two at Morning Prayer and the third at Evening Prayer) or you can find another reading. The normal way to do this is to use the Old Testament reading from the off-year and place it as the first reading for Evening Prayer.

In terms of completeness, the lectionary does a good job with the New Testament. Of the Gospels, all of Matthew and Mark are read each year. Luke is missing about fifty verses (4 percent of its length), but these are the genealogy and the iconic birth story and his appearance in the temple at age twelve, which are included in the Eucharistic Lectionary. John is missing about eighty verses (9 percent of its length), and these are all sections from the passion and resurrection narratives, which, again, are well represented in the Eucharistic Lectionary.

Of the New Testament apart from the Gospels, the large stand-alone books of Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation are read in their entirety each year. We read 97 percent of both the Pauline Epistles and the general Epistles. Missing from the general Epistles is one section from 1 Peter 3 dealing with wives being submissive to their husbands; most of the material missing from the Pauline Letters, primarily from 1 Corinthians

and 1 Timothy, similarly deals with the social roles of women and slaves. Two verses missing from Romans loom large in many current discussions of human sexuality.¹⁵

When we come to the Old Testament, the percentage drops. Overall, across both years—or in one year if you read two readings—we read just under half of the Old Testament. When you look at it by category, we read more percentage-wise of the minor prophets than any other grouping (72 percent as opposed to the others at about 40 percent). This is due mostly to the brief length of these books. Year One reads through about 22 percent of the Old Testament and contains more of the histories and the major prophets. Year Two reads about 25 percent and contains more of the minor prophets, the law, and the wisdom literature. There is some overlap in which certain passages are read in both years (apart from the holy day readings). This occurs mostly in Isaiah, the histories, and Genesis and Exodus, but it accounts for under 10 percent of what is read each year.

Why so little of the Old Testament by percentage? It's pretty simple: math. The Gospel readings and other New Testament readings average about eight and seven verses long respectively. The Old Testament readings currently average a little under ten verses in length. If you were going to move through the entire Old Testament, you would have to more than double that amount. If you want to keep the length of the three readings balanced, this is the problem you're going to have to face.

The original Daily Office Lectionary scheme that Cranmer came up with when he compiled the first *Book of Common Prayer* included most (but not all) of the Old Testament each year. Readings were typically assigned by chapter not verse; thus, on January 4, for example, you would read Genesis 5 in the morning and Genesis 6 in the evening. The corresponding New Testament and Gospel readings that were of an equal

length went through the full cycle three times in a year. That is a lot more reading than what we have now. In fact, looking over the past 500 years, we have seen the length of the readings steadily drop over time. The goal is to get people to pray the Office and read their scriptures. The trend has been to reduce the time it takes by reducing the amount of scripture required.

Like the seven-week psalm cycle, the Daily Office Lectionary has two different options for the sake of occasional use. For the most part, biblical books are read through continuously. That is, a reading will generally stick with a book and read straight through it, or, when it does skip material, it usually does so sequentially. However, this sequence is interrupted for Sundays. A different cycle of readings appears on Sunday for the benefit of those who only experience the Offices once a week—or less—and who may have occasion to experience a Sunday reading and not any of the others. Thus, the Daily Office Lectionary will jump on Sundays to a different place and pick up a different story than what has been read through the rest of the week.

The Canticles

Following each biblical reading is a canticle. When I first experienced Episcopal Morning Prayer as a Lutheran seminarian, I was completely baffled by the canticles. The priest leading the group would call out a number; she never had any hesitation about what to pick. Some canticles were often said, but others were never said. Furthermore, other people in the group seemed to know in advance what she was going to say. I had a hard enough time finding the right number, since the first canticle that I saw was numbered 8! Eventually, I got it all figured out, but I have never forgotten my initial confusion.

What I didn't know was that the canticles numbered 1 through 7 are located in Morning Prayer: Rite I. Canticles 8 through 21 are in Morning Prayer: Rite II. All of the canticles in Rite I appear in contemporary language in Rite II, but not vice-versa. Furthermore, there is no inherent or logical connection between the Rite I numbers and their Rite II counterparts. So your first challenge in negotiating the canticles is navigating through them. Some canticles are also usually used for Morning Prayer, while others are customarily used at Evening Prayer (which is why I never heard them).

There is a basic principle at work here. In both the Rite I and Rite II blocks, the canticles appear in canonical/chronological order. Thus, the Rite I block starts with material from the Apocrypha, goes through the canticles from Luke in canonical order, then moves to the two compositions from the Early Church. In a corresponding fashion, the Rite II block starts with material from Exodus, then goes to the canticles from Isaiah before moving to the Apocrypha but adds an additional one before moving to the Luke material and items from Revelation, then ending with the Early Church compositions.

As with the invitatory psalms, the names of the canticles are given both in English and in a classical language, usually Latin. People and reference works may use either name, so it never hurts to be familiar with both.

Canticles 1 and 12 are "A Song of Creation" (*Benedicite, omnia opera Domini*). The *Benedicite* comes from one of the additions to the book of Daniel that is found in the Greek Old Testament but not in the Hebrew version. It's best understood as an expansion of the content and theme of Psalm 148 where all creation is called upon to worship and give glory to God. In the narrative, this is a song put into the mouth of Daniel's three companions in the midst of the fiery furnace. As a result, sometimes this will be referred to as "the song of the three

young men." In the former prayer books, this canticle was used as the first canticle during penitential seasons when the *Te Deum* was suppressed. That's not because there's anything penitential about it—it's one of the most joyful canticles around! Rather it is because this was the second canticle found in the pre-Reformation primers (medieval prayer books) and Books of Hours; if the *Te Deum*—which was the first canticle in them—was dropped, this one was next in line. Hence, the tradition grew that the *Benedicite* should replace the *Te Deum*, and this tradition subsequently formed the prayer book practice.

Canticles 2 and 13 are "A Song of Praise" (*Benedictus es, Domine*). This song comes from the same place as the previous canticle and comes right before it in the text. While the first one calls all creation to bless God, this is an example of such a blessing. It praises God, envisioning him enthroned within a grand temple having aspects of the temple in Jerusalem but being located "in the firmament of heaven." Dwelling "between the Cherubim" is a reference to the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant, which was kept in the Holy of Holies, the inmost part of the Jerusalem temple.

Canticles 3 and 15 are "The Song of Mary" (*Magnificat*). This is one of the most beautiful songs in all of scripture and is Mary's response to the dual greeting from her cousin Elizabeth and the yet-unborn John the Baptist. Based in part on the Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and with echoes of Psalm 138 and 146, it admirably anticipates Luke's Beatitudes (Luke 6:20-26)—and, indeed, they are well worth studying together. In the pre-Reformation system, Evening Prayer (their Vespers) only had one canticle—and this was it. As a result, it became the standard third canticle, the one after the first reading of Evening Prayer. It still holds this place in both Rite I and Rite II services of Evening Prayer.

Canticles 4 and 16 are “The Song of Zechariah” (*Benedictus Dominus Deus*). This song was sung by Zechariah, the husband of Elizabeth and father of John the Baptist, at his son’s birth. This was the standard second canticle of Morning Prayer and was the chief canticle of the pre-Reformation version. I have always found the second part of this song especially meaningful. Through the voice of Zechariah, we who pray this canticle are commissioned and reminded of our duty to spread the Gospel—and are given a convenient summary of it, focusing on forgiveness, mercy, light, and walking in the paths of peace.

Canticles 5 and 17 are “The Song of Simeon” (*Nunc dimittis*). Simeon, having waited all his life to see the Messiah, holds the infant Jesus in his arms at the end of his days and sings this song. With its themes of ending and new beginning, a growing light and a coming peace, it was used in the pre-Reformation system at Compline just before sleep. Adapted into the prayer book system, it became the fixed fourth canticle, following the second reading of Evening Prayer.

Canticles 6 and 20 are the “Glory (be) to God” (*Gloria in excelsis*). While it begins with the song of the angels at the birth of Christ, the rest of the canticle is a composition from the Early Church. Familiar to most of the Western Church from its use at the beginning of the Eucharist, its appearance here is an eastern element; this was the standard morning canticle for the Eastern Churches.

Canticles 7 and 21 are the “We Praise Thee/You” (*Te Deum laudamus*). Another composition of the Early Church, the *Te Deum* was sung at Matins on Sundays and festivals. At the Reformation, the prayer book appointed this as the first canticle of Morning Prayer every day of the year except for the forty days of Lent. Its connection with festivals was strong enough that, by the early medieval period, the *Te Deum*

was sometimes used with some additional suffrages as a celebratory liturgy.

Canticle 8—the first of the canticles only found in Rite II’s contemporary language—is “The Song of Moses” (*Cantemus Domino*). It is “especially suitable for use in Easter Season” because this is the song sung by Moses and the Israelites after their deliverance from Egypt through the Red Sea. The Red Sea passage has long been understood as a symbol of Baptism and Resurrection, and this connection is stated explicitly in the Easter Vigil’s own victory song, the *Exultet*.

Canticle 9 is “The First Song of Isaiah” (*Ecce, Deus*). Coming from the prophet Isaiah, this song concludes his vision of the messianic age to come. This song is to be sung in celebration of what God has accomplished and the salvation wrought through his messiah. For us, it is a reminder that we stand in the midst of the “already/not yet;” God’s promises have been fulfilled in the person of Jesus, yet we do not always perceive the fulfilment of these promises. The use of this canticle is a sign of hope.

Canticle 10 is “The Second Song of Isaiah” (*Quaerite Dominum*). This song comes from the latter part of Isaiah. It closes out a section that encourages the people, exiled in Babylon, to return and rebuild Jerusalem to its former glory. It urges them to seek the Lord and to trust in the fulfillment of the divine word at a point when many doubted that the city would ever be rebuilt and the land reclaimed. The language of repentance makes it particularly suitable in penitential seasons.

Canticle 11 is “The Third Song of Isaiah” (*Surge, Illuminare*). This song from the end of Isaiah, also from the time at the end of the exile (around 520 BCE), exhorts the people with a vision of the rebuilt Jerusalem. This vision of a preternaturally brilliant city that calls the nations to it influenced Revelation’s vision of the New Jerusalem as the

Bride of the Lamb and, subsequently, the theology of the Church as a New Jerusalem. The images of light connect it strongly to the themes of both Advent and Epiphany.

Canticle 14 is “A Song of Penitence” (*Kyrie Pantokrator*). This canticle comes from the brief apocryphal book, *The Prayer of Manasseh*. Manasseh was crowned as king of Judah at the age of twelve around 700 BCE and reigned for fifty-five years. He has the dubious honor of being the most evil king to hold the throne of Judah. The narrative of his reign in 2 Kings 21 is a catalog of idolatry and slaughter. The retelling of it in 2 Chronicles 33, however, includes a scene of Manasseh’s repentance and makes mention of a prayer where he humbled himself before God and received forgiveness of his sin. Although our composition is likely not this prayer itself, it certainly represents what the prayer could have been.¹⁶ It is, as the prayer book note suggests, the perfect canticle for Lent and for other penitential circumstances.

Canticle 18 is “A Song to the Lamb” (*Dignus es*). While the Book of Revelation is known for its apocalyptic imagery and its abuse by those who would read modern political events through it, it should be better known as the book of the New Testament that contains the most songs! This canticle comes from the description of the heavenly throne room. We are treated in Revelation 4-6 to a vision of the throne room of God, where a set of concentric circles of worshipers arrays the whole created order in a ceaseless song of praise to God and to the Lamb. This is the celebration of the saints and angels and all creation in thanksgiving for creation and redemption.

Canticle 19 is “The Song of the Redeemed” (*Magna et mirabilia*). In an interlude between acts of judgment and the seven last plagues, the seer John has a vision of the martyrs singing a song described as “the song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the Lamb” (Revelation 15:3). This canticle is that song. From the introduction, then, the author

of Revelation intended this song to be in conscious continuity with our Canticle 8, the Song of Moses.

Now that we’ve gotten through all of these, how do we go about using them and what’s the best way to arrange them? What canticle should you use when—and why?

There are several ways of answering this question. Like so much about the prayer book, it depends on your tradition—and that, in turn, gives us the simplest answer. Does your parish pray the Office together? If so, it’s best to find out what pattern they go with and use it.

If not, there are a variety of choices. I’ll talk you through three of them.

The simplest is a traditional pattern that has the least amount of variation. As I mentioned in discussing the canticles, the prayer books up until the present one had a fairly fixed order. There were four readings, two at each Office, and a canticle after each reading. The first canticle was either the *Te Deum* or the *Benedicite*—depending on the season. The three Gospel canticles, the *Benedictus*, the *Magnificat*, and the *Nunc Dimittis* were the second, third, and fourth canticles respectively. The reason why these canticles appear in these positions is based on how Cranmer consolidated the eight hours of prayer into two: Morning Prayer received the *Te Deum* from Matins and the *Benedictus* from Lauds; Evening Prayer received the *Magnificat* from Vespers and the *Nunc Dimittis* from Compline. Thus, the simplest way to arrange the canticles is to use this basic pattern.

One of the more complex options is the way that the prayer book recommends. After the Offices themselves, a means of deploying all of the canticles appears on pages 144 and 145. We’ll start with the suggestions for Morning Prayer on page 144. The basic idea is that the Old Testament Lesson receives an Old Testament canticle and the New Testament

Lesson receives a New Testament/Early Church canticle. Sundays and feast days retain the traditional canticles, though not in the traditional order; Wednesday and Friday—the traditional fasting days—receive the more penitential materials, especially in Lent. Additionally, in Lent and Advent the *Te Deum* and *Gloria* are replaced by other options. The easiest way to use this chart is to write it in where you intend to use it. As a result, in several of my prayer books, I have copied it into the blank space at the bottom of page 84 and have also written the appropriate days and seasons at the top of the canticles themselves.

The suggestions for Evening Prayer on page 145 assume the use of two lessons at Evening Prayer. If you are only using one lesson, use the second column and alternate between the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis*. Otherwise, it alternates between the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc dimittis* for the second canticle except on Sundays and feast days when both are used. On weekdays the first canticle rotates through a set of Old Testament options.

A third way to proceed is by a blend of these two. For those who want to retain the classical use of the *Benedictus* and the *Magnificat* but also experience the variety of new canticles that this prayer book offers, the Old Testament option for Morning Prayer can be followed with the *Benedictus* after the second lesson; the New Testament option for Morning Prayer can be used to follow the first lesson at Evening Prayer and use the *Magnificat* after the second lesson.

The truth is, it doesn't matter which pattern you use—only that you use one. The canticles serve as constant reminders that a most proper response to God is bursting out into song. The advantage of a pattern is that, like the lectionary, we intentionally move through several options—not just picking our favorite parts. And, in the act of being paired up, the canticles and the readings invite us to regard them together as

a set. What does the reading say to us in light of the canticle's praise? Conversely, what light does the reading shed on the canticle as it informs us about the nature of God and our relationships with him and his creation?

The Apostles' Creed

Finally, after all of this biblical material, the Lessons finish up with the Apostles' Creed. As we discussed in the Calendar section, the creed is the Church's guideline for interpreting scripture. In this position, the Apostles' Creed stands both as a summary of our faith and a reminder of our key interpretive principles: all readings, all canticles, are read in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the revelation of the Triune God.

THE PRAYERS

These are the elements of the prayers:

Element	Required?	Variation (if any)
Lord's Prayer	Yes	None
Suffrages	Yes	Choice of 2
Collects	Yes	Variable
Prayer for Mission	Yes	Choice of 3
General Thanksgiving	No	None
A Prayer of St. Chrysostom	No	None
Blessing	No	None
Closing Benediction	No	Choice of 3

After having frontloaded the Office with adoration, praise, and thanksgiving in the psalms and the scripture lessons, we move toward intercession and petition.

The Lord's Prayer

Since the second century, Church writers have urged that the Lord's Prayer be prayed three times a day.¹⁷ Incorporating it within Morning and Evening Prayer is one of the simplest ways to accomplish this. In this central prayer, we remind ourselves to align our wills with God's, we ask for our daily sustenance, and we commit ourselves to forgiving that we might be forgiven. Taking Christ's words upon our lips, we properly start our prayers by grounding ourselves in his prayer.

The Suffrages

The world that birthed the Church had a great respect for canonical works. The deep study of Homer's works and Virgil's *Aeneid* gave birth to a new art form, the *cento*, or, as we now call it, the mashup. As a means of demonstrating their mastery of canonical texts, authors would compose new works created entirely by taking snippets, phrases, and lines from these epics and using them to construct a new story. The rules for this kind of poetic composition were first written out by Ausonius in the fourth century. Needless to say, Church writers took part. One of the first great compositions by a Christian woman writer was Proba's life of Jesus constructed entirely from pieces of the *Aeneid*.

Since we see this kind of play at work with the epics of the time, it is not surprising to find it in the liturgies that were being constructed around this time as well. Our suffrages are composed in just this style. Rather than taking pieces out of Virgil, though, the suffrages are put together with pieces from different psalms. Suffrages A are a version adapted from the Sarum Breviary for the first prayer book and used thereafter with some modifications. The Morning Prayer Suffrages B are a very old set that historically traveled along with the

Te Deum. As a result, my preference is to use this set whenever the *Te Deum* is used as a canticle. The Evening Prayer Suffrages B are not related to the cento form and are standard intercessions.

The Collects

The officiant is then directed to say "one or more of the following Collects." The Collect of the Day is listed first along with seven other collects. According to the rubric, we may choose to use the Collect of the Day and another collect, to simply pray the Collect of the Day, or to skip it and to pray only one of the printed collects. As I have argued in the chapter on the Collects, the Collect of the Day is an important link that binds us to the Church Year and connects our Office cycles with our weekly Eucharists. We don't have to pray the Collect of the Day—but it's definitely a good idea.

Of the next seven collects, the first three are identified as pertaining to specific days of the week. Although the remaining four have titles related to various other purposes, it takes no great stretch of the imagination to create from them a weekly cycle. Indeed, it is probably not accidental that the collect that would fall on Thursday evening contains such strong Eucharistic resonances given that the Eucharist was established on a Thursday evening.

The Prayers for Mission

The final required element in the Office is the inclusion of one of the three prayers for mission or a form of general intercession. The prayers for mission are, at root, prayers for the whole Church, asking that it be strengthened to fulfill its fundamental mission of manifesting the good news with which we have been entrusted. The third prayer in the morning has a particularly rich image of Christ's arms

extended on the cross embracing the world; the second prayer in the evening is based on a prayer by Saint Augustine and paints a lovely picture of the compassionate presence of God.

The option for a general intercession has two main referents. At Morning Prayer, this is the point where the Great Litany may be inserted. Classically, it was prayed on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday at the conclusion of Morning Prayer because it served as the transition to the Eucharist that was appointed on those days. The regulation to insert it on those days remained in the American prayer books until the 1928 revision, and it still appears in the English *Book of Common Prayer*. Alternatively, two prayers were written to be used together at the end of the service on days when the Litany was not being used: the Prayer for All Sorts and Conditions, which served as a general intercession, and the General Thanksgiving. While the General Thanksgiving is still included here, the Prayer for All Sorts and Conditions has been relegated to the back of our prayer book on pages 814-815.

The Final Prayers

A set of optional prayers then follows. The General Thanksgiving is a much-loved prayer for its stately cadences and its even-tempered joy. The echo of the *Benedictus* in the passage that speaks of “walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days” is surely not accidental. The Prayer of Saint Chrysostom likewise puts beautiful poetry to our request that God hear our prayers and grant them as may be best for us. Just as this section opened with the Lord’s Prayer asking that “your will be done,” this final prayer comes full circle, requesting that we be reconciled to the answering of our prayers— whether we receive the answer that we wish or not. The final optional act is to bless God and for us, in turn, to receive a blessing as well.

CHAPTER 7

THE PSALMS

THE SOURCE OF THE PSALMS

At the heart of the historic discipline of the Office are the psalms. The recitation of the psalms has always been a central part of the Office, and many of the other elements in the Office are either borrowed from or directly inspired by the psalms. As a result, it’s worth taking a closer look at them.

Psalms (capitalized) refers to a book of the Old Testament containing 150 chapters. These chapters are, for the most part, discrete poems or songs known as psalms (not capitalized) that involve the relationship between God and his people, whether individually or corporately. What makes the psalms unusual, given our typical perspective on the Bible, is their direction. That is, we ordinarily consider the Bible to be God’s self-revelation to humanity—God’s Word, revealing himself to us. The psalms, though, are prayers from humanity to God, noteworthy for their emotional vulnerability and self-disclosure—feeling often more like humanity’s self-revelation to God! Thus, the psalms are a paradox of sorts: divine revelation laying bare the soul of humanity.