

THE DAILY OFFICE: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Daily Morning and Evening Prayer can be very intimidating at first, especially without a background in liturgical prayer. This basic tutorial aims to demystify the structure of the Office so beginners can start praying with the Book of Common Prayer.

Where? When? Who?

The Daily Office may be said at any time in any place. There's no requirement that it be said in a church at a specific hour. But setting regular times and places for yourself can be very helpful for keeping the discipline.

The Daily Offices are meant to be said with others as a corporate service. But it's sadly quite difficult to find an Episcopal parish that offers the Office as a regular (let alone daily) service these days. This guide will teach you to pray on your own. Maybe with time you'll gather a group to pray with you!

Getting it 'Rite'

The *Book of Common Prayer* provides two forms for Morning and Evening Prayer: Rite I and Rite II. Rite I uses more archaic English forms like 'thou' and 'thee'. Rite II uses English as we speak it today, though still in a more 'elevated' style than casual speech. The wording is different, but the structure is the same for both rites.

Rite I:	Morning Prayer (p. 37) Evening Prayer (p. 61)
Rite II:	Morning Prayer (p. 75) Evening Prayer (p. 115)

Basic Structure

1. Opening Sentences

The Office opens with a sentence from Scripture. In Morning Prayer these are organized according to the liturgical seasons, including special ones for feasts, fasts, and saints' days. The opening sentences for Evening Prayer aren't organized by season, however, and can be used at any time.

2. Confession & Absolution

While confession may be left out, it is worth noting that the longer introductory paragraph lays out a justification for the entire Office. Confession lets us "prepare ourselves in heart and mind" for worship, and is a very worthwhile practice. Note that if you're a lay person, the pronoun in the absolution is different.

3. Invitatory

Having "prepared ourselves," this section "invites" us to worship. Here rings the first of several *Gloria Patri's*, which is simply the Latin for the opening words "Glory to the Father..." You'll find that old Latin titles are retained in most of the BCP, since the Anglican tradition is part of the Western, Latin tradition.

After the Alleluia comes the Invitatory Psalm. In Morning Prayer you can choose either the *Venite* or the *Jubilate* (the *Pascha Nostrum* is used during Easter), and you can add a seasonal antiphon before and after the psalm if you choose. In Evening Prayer, this section is simplified to the ancient Greek hymn *Phos Hilaron* ('O Gracious Light'), said without antiphons.

4. Psalms

Here you pray the Psalms for the day according to the schedule you're using, praying the *Gloria Patri* after the Psalms. There are two Psalm schedules to choose from. The 'lighter' one gives Psalms with the readings in the Daily Office Lectionary (p. 934); the 'heavier' one appoints Psalms in a 30-day cycle, found in the Psalter itself (p. 585).

1. Opening Sentences
2. Confession & Absolution
3. Invitatory
4. Psalms
5. Lessons & Canticles
6. Apostles' Creed
7. Salutation & Lord's Prayer
8. Suffrages
9. Collects
10. Optional Prayers
11. Closing

5. Lessons & Canticles

After the Psalms, you read one or two selections (lessons) from Scripture. These are also found in the Daily Office Lectionary (p. 934). The Readings are introduced as they are on a normal Sunday. There are a few options for concluding a reading listed in each Office (p. 84 for Rite II Morning Prayer). Some don't require any response from others.

Each reading is followed by a Canticle. These are mostly songs taken from Scripture, though a few are ancient songs of praise. The Canticles are numbered in a confusing way. Despite appearances from the numbering, Rite II has all the same Canticles as Rite I, just in a different order and translated into contemporary language. Rite II also offers a number of Canticles that Rite I doesn't have.

To pick a Canticle, you can follow the schedule on pp. 144–145. Or you can follow a more traditional pattern that focuses mostly on the hymns from Luke:

Morning:

Te Deum (Canticle 7/21)
or *Benedicite* (Canticle 1/12)
Benedictus (Canticle 4/16)

Evening:

Magnificat (Canticle 3/15)
Nunc Dimittis (Canticle 5/17)

6. Apostles' Creed

Pretty simple! Just say it!

If you do both Morning and Evening Prayer on the same day, you can skip the creed in one of them as long as you do it in the other.

7. Salutation & Lord's Prayer

Before the Lord's Prayer, there's a salutation and response. If you're on your own, you can say both parts or skip right to the prayer.

8. Suffrages

These are snippets from the Psalms arranged in a call-and-response format. The Officiant says the V (versicle) parts, and the People says the R (response) parts. Or you can say both if you're alone. Use either set.

9. Collects

Here the Officiant prays one or more Collects (a kind of prayer). This can include the Collect from the previous Sunday (The Collect of the Day). There are specific Collects for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Traditionally there are fixed daily collects: "A Collect for Peace" (p. 99) & "A Collect for Grace," (p. 100) for Morning Prayer and "A Collect for Peace" & "A Collect for Aid against Perils" (both p. 123) for Evening Prayer. But you can use any of the ones there!

Unless there's a Eucharist or a special set of prayers, you then proceed to use one of the three "Prayers for Mission."

After the Prayer for Mission you can sing a hymn and/or pray for anything that needs praying for. You can use prayers from the prayerbook (p. 810) or pray from your heart.

10. Optional Prayers

Before the close of the service you can pray the General Thanksgiving and/or the Prayer of St. Chrysostom. The Prayer of St. Chrysostom is especially fitting when you're praying the Office with a group.

11. Closing

The Office is finished with a final call to bless the Lord and an optional blessing from Scripture.

Useful Pages

Morning Prayer (Rite I)	37
Morning Prayer (Rite II)	75
Noonday Prayer	103
Evening Prayer (Rite I)	61
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Compline	127
Daily Office Directions	141
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