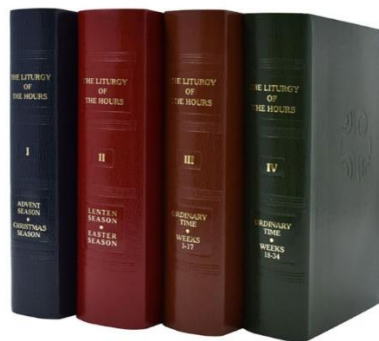


Praying the Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office or the Work of God (Opus Dei), is a beautiful and ancient tradition in the Church marking the hours of each day and sanctifying the day with prayer. It is not reserved for clerics and religious (although they take vows to say it), but can also be prayed by the lay faithful. In fact, the Second Vatican Council highly encouraged the laity to “recite the divine office [especially Morning and Evening Prayer-the Major hours], either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 100). The Hours are a meditative dialogue on the mystery of Christ, using scripture and prayer.

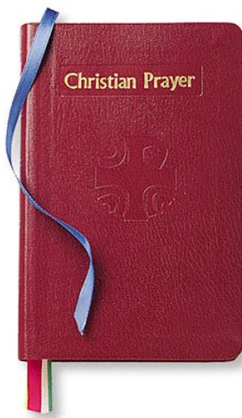
The foundation of the prayer is simple – praying the Psalms – but in practicality can be difficult. If one chooses to purchase a physical breviary (the book that contains the Liturgy of the Hours, it can be challenging – especially if no one is there to show you what to do. However, after an initial introduction to praying the Liturgy of the Hours, it becomes much easier and soon it will be like clockwork.

There are two main forms of the breviary. You can purchase a four-volume set entitled ***The Liturgy of the Hours*** from the Catholic Book Publishing. You can usually purchase for as low as \$155. However, you can also purchase one volume at a time:



This four-volume set contains prayers for all the hours of the day: Office of Readings (Major Hour); *Lauds* or Morning Prayer (Major Hour); Daytime Prayer (minor hour(s)-one or more of *Terce* (Midmorning), *Sext* (Midday), or *None* (Midafternoon); *Vespers* (Major Hour); and *Compline* or Night Prayer.

The second form of the breviary is the one-volume ***Book of Christian Prayer***, also from Catholic Book Publishing. You can purchase this from as low as \$35:



The Book of Christian Prayer contains only Morning (Lauds), Evening (Vespers) and Night (Compline) Prayer with an abbreviated section for the Office of Readings and Daytime Prayer. It is designed for the everyday lay person who wants to deepen their prayer life by immersing themselves in the Psalms.

For this instructional purpose, I will give you a step-by-step guide through the *Book of Christian Prayer*. But note – there are other publications of the Divine Office, including digital versions, but for the purposes of this article I will only cover the *Book of Christian Prayer*.

So, let's begin our walk-through.

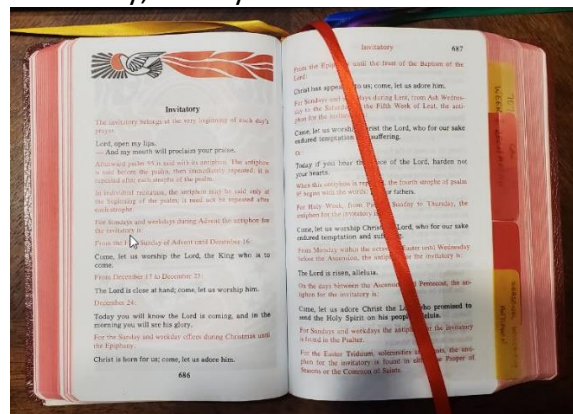
First of all, as with any breviary, there are the all-important “ribbons.” These are extremely important and allow you to mark the correct parts of the Divine Office.

To begin setting the ribbons, take one of them and open to page 686 where the “Ordinary” and “Invitatory” are located. The Ordinary is the basic “instruction manual,” if you will, for the Liturgy of the Hours and acts as a reference point if you ever get stuck. The Ordinary itself is not labeled. It is the entire section from page 686 to 698.

In the Ordinary we abide by the common phrase “Say the Black, Do the Red.” All the words printed in the color red are instructions and all the words printed in black are the prayers you actually pray. There are plenty of instructions and options, so read it carefully but don't be intimidated. They are easy to follow. It is suggested to read through the entire Ordinary before going any further.

The Ordinary also has prayers that are repeated each day such as the Cantic of Zechariah (*Benedictus*) and the Cantic of Mary (*Magnificat*). These prayers are said at Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. After praying the Liturgy of the Hours often, these prayers typically become memorized. Until they are, though, you can always turn to the Ordinary to find them.

After you have read the Ordinary, leave your first ribbon where it says Invitatory:



This is composed of an antiphon and Psalm 95 and is typically prayed before Morning Prayer (or the Office of Readings if done first in the day). In this diocese, you will say the correct antiphon once, then pray Psalm 95, then recite the Doxology, and then recite the same antiphon at the end. In other places, the antiphon may be recited after every stanza of the Psalm.

A quick note on the Doxology – you will notice that in the Book of Christian Prayer, the Doxology differs from the standard “Glory be.” Don’t worry – they are not two different prayers. What you are seeing is a translation thing. Same prayer, two translations. The version you use for the rosary, with novenas, and other devotions is the traditional translation: *Glory Be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit/As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.* The version in our breviaries: *Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit/As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever...* is the 1970 translation courtesy of ICEL, the same organization that gave us our missal in 1970. (the same missal that had to be re-translated after Rome determined that it was not sufficiently faithful to the Latin of the Roman Missal).

Same prayer, not a different prayer. Just a different translation.

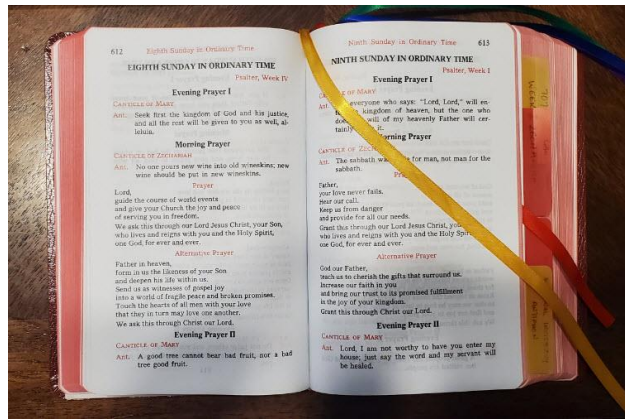
So if you prefer the traditional “Glory Be” when you are **privately** praying your office, go right ahead. Many priests and deacons, including myself, do exactly that. However, it's probably best not to let your personal tastes prevail when you pray with a group. You don't want to confuse newcomers, or give the impression that you are trying to drown out the current translation with the traditional one in some kind of liturgical shouting match. **Unity** is the ideal for liturgical prayer.

Right now our bishops are working on a new edition of the American breviary. It is quite possible that they will go back to the traditional doxology. It is also possible that they will come up with a version that is different from either the current one OR the traditional one. I say this because that phrase “world without end” is not necessarily the most accurate translation of the Latin *et in saecula saeculorum*. Other languages have translated this as something more like “ages upon ages” or “forever and ever”.

Okay, now that that is out of the way, let’s continue. Unlike the full version of the Divine Office, like what is found in the four-volume set, the antiphons in the *Book of Christian Prayer* are only printed once at the beginning of each Psalm and Scripture passage. That means after praying a Psalm or other passage, you will have to flip the page backwards to recite the correct antiphon. This is important to remember and will be repeated in Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, etc.

The second ribbon to be set will be located in the front of the breviary in a section called the “Proper of the Seasons.” This section of the breviary has all the prayers according to the liturgical seasons of the Church: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time. In this section there are special antiphons and prayers for the hours prayed on Sundays throughout the year. During special seasons such as Lent, there are specific readings and prayers for each day.

For purposes of this tutorial, turn to page 613. Place the second ribbon on page 613:

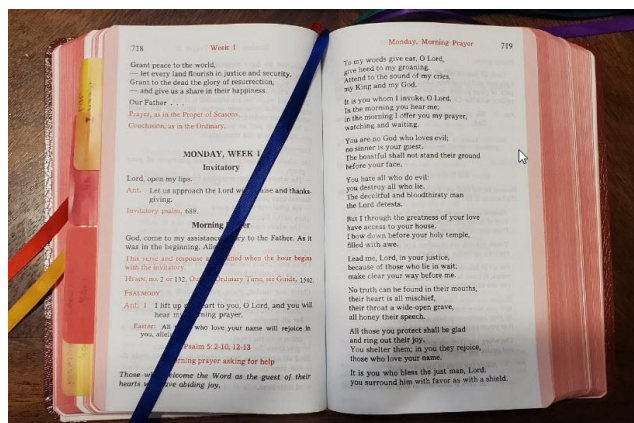


It says on the top of the page, “Ninth Sunday In Ordinary Time.” In order to figure out what week it is, go to <http://www.usccb.org/> and click on their calendar on the right hand side of the page:



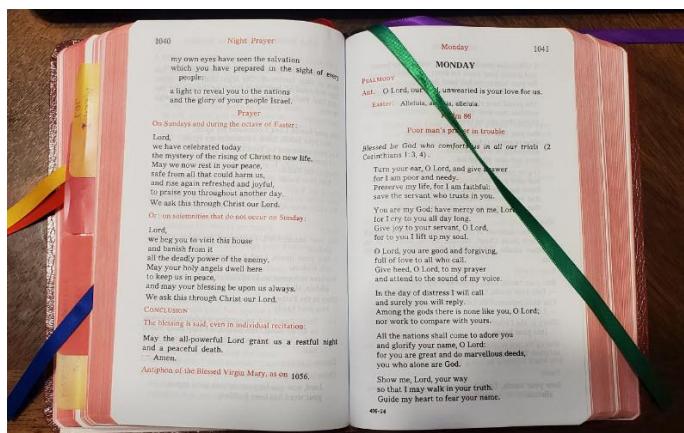
This is an important part of the breviary as underneath the current Sunday, it states which “Psalter” we are currently in. As of the week shown on page 613, it reads “Psalter, Week I” below “Ninth Sunday In Ordinary Time.” This indicates where to put your third ribbon.

This third ribbon will be located in the middle of the breviary and for our purposes is on page 718. It reads in the middle of the page, “Monday, Week 1”:

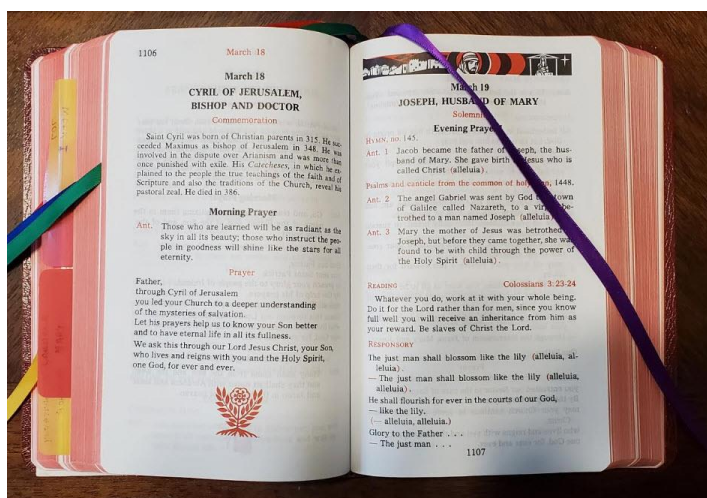


and is where you want to be. If you ever get confused on which Psalter you are supposed to be in, go back to the Proper of Seasons (second ribbon) and the current Sunday will indicate which one is correct.

The fourth ribbon should be located at the current day for “Night Prayer,” which is much easier to understand, as it only has a single cycle that is repeated each week. In keeping with the Monday of the first week in Ordinary time, this fourth ribbon will be located on page 1041:



The fifth ribbon can be placed in the section entitled, “Proper of Saints,” which contains the special prayers and antiphons for specific saint feast days – both obligatory and optional. For this section, all you need to know is the calendar date to know where to put the ribbon. To know if the day is obligatory or optional, consult the calendar located on the U.S. Bishops’ website at <http://www.usccb.org/>. For this tutorial, I have located my fifth ribbon on March 19, the obligatory solemnity of Joseph, the husband of Mary, on page 1107.



Once you have all of the ribbons in place, you can start praying the Liturgy of the Hours every day. If you ever get lost or confused, go to the “Ordinary” (the first ribbon) and it will tell you what to do.

At first, this type of prayer can be confusing, but after several days of praying it goes much smoother. After a time, it becomes almost second nature.

It is true that alternatively, you could download one of the many apps to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and not have to worry about setting ribbons. However, and admittedly this is my opinion, praying with a prayer book in your hands, and turning the pages, is very beneficial. In an age when everything is available at the touch of a finger, it is healthy to learn the art of praying the Divine Office and learn a little patience in the process.

Praying the Liturgy of the Hours is a beautiful custom, one in which you are united to the entire Church and to bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and other lay people from around the world. Next to the Liturgies of the Mass, there are no greater prayers.