

## Introduction to the Daily Offices

### History of the Hours

From Old Testament times God's people have sought to offer the *whole* of their day and *all* their various doings to God. The Daily Offices provide concrete expression to this God-centered devotion and view of life. Traditionally, there are seven hours of prayer (or seven times in the day when God's people stop to pray). The reason is that seven is the *complete* number. Thus, God's people are offering the whole day to God. This same notion was visibly represented by the seven lights of the Temple Lamp (the Menorah) and later by the "Office Candles" still seen in many churches today.

Psalm 119:164 Seven times a day I praise Thee, Because of Thy righteous ordinances.

The practice of offering the whole of the day to God continued in the New Testament era and down through Church History.

Luke 1:10 And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. 11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias, standing to the right of the altar of incense.

Acts 3:1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.

Canon LXIV of the Nicene Council concerns the Daily Hours and assumes their practice.

In fact, the Daily Offices were only relegated to the monasteries during the Middle Ages when people no longer spoke Latin and thus the prayers, (along with Scripture and the worship services) were lost to them.

Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer sought to provide a correction to the problem. It returned the Offices to the language of the people. At the same time, Cranmer sought to simplify the Offices, removing from them the very complex monastic form that they had assumed during the Middle Ages. It was thus that Cranmer combined all the hours into the two main Offices, Prime and Vespers (Morning and Evening prayer). Likewise he returned them to the common worship of the people. However, while this was a much needed reform, it only recaptured a portion of that which had been lost during the Middle Ages. For example, the Prayer Book Offices were intended for formal worship rather than devotion set in

the midst of the workday. Likewise, the Offices were too long for most people to say at regular intervals throughout the day.

The Offices presented here are an attempt to continue what others before began. They are in no way an attempt to replace or supplant the services of Morning and Evening Prayer. Instead, they are meant to complement them by providing a vital aspect of the prayer life of God's people that the Prayer Book Offices did not address. The Prayer Book seeks to provide corporate prayer services for a formal worship setting. The Hours aim to provide corporate prayer services that are joined by God's people throughout the day in the midst of their daily occupations. As such, they seek to enable God people as a people to offer the whole day to God from within that day.

### **Practical How To**

The Daily Offices follow the major seasons of the church year (Advent- Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Trinity). Select the Offices for the current season.

Next, the Offices for each season are arranged according to the 7 hours of prayer. Select the hour that is closest to your current time. The 7 hours of prayer are:

Lauds- 3AM

Prime- 6AM

Terse- 9AM

Sext- 12Noon

None- 3PM

Vespers- 6PM

Compline- Before Bed

It is important to remember that the Daily offices are meant to be flexible and to fit into your schedule. For example, if your day starts at 5, start the hours then. If it starts after the kids get dropped off at school, start the hours at that time. The point is, work them into the rhythm of your day.

The hours assume a daily time of focused Scripture reading. They do not replace it. One may use their Scripture time in place of one of hours, incorporate it into the hour, or use the collects to end their time of Scripture reading. Again find what works for you.

In this series of hours, Prime through Compline is the normal routine. Laud (3am) assumes that if you are up during the middle of the night, it is because you have something on your mind or can't sleep. Laud is structured for those occasions. That

said, you may want to use the office of Laud one or two times just to get a feel for what it is about.

It may be hard to do all the offices each day. Therefore, you might arrange them like this:

Monday: do Prime in the morning, Sext around lunch, and Vespers at the end of the work day. Then end the day with Compline just before bed.

Tuesday: start with Terse in the morning, None around lunch, and Vespers at the end of the work day. Then end the day with Compline just before bed.

Or maybe you will simply remember that the Offices are here and go through the noonday Office one day during a long lunch break, or the mid-afternoon prayer while waiting in a carpool line, or the Compline service on an evening when you feel God drawing you to Him.

Again find what works for you. Be flexible enough to fit the hours into the particulars of your schedule and committed enough to do so.

Each office should take 7-10 minutes. Therefore, do not dilly-dally or belabor points. At the same time, do not rush. Instead, stay focused and offer your worship to God.

Remember a prayer is never read. It is not a prayer until it is offered.

When saying the Offices by yourself, read both the leader's portion (marked with a "V") as well as the responses (marked with a "R"). For example:

V. Receive, O Lord, our prayers this hour  
R. The offering to you of this day. Amen.

When saying an Office with others, have one person read the Leader's portion (V) and the others read the responses (R). Anything not marked with a V or R is either to be said in unison (e.g. the confession of sin and the Lord's Prayer) or it is done by the Leader (e.g. the Collects).

A "Collect" is another term for "prayer of the day". It is so called because it is the corporate (or collective) prayer of the whole congregation. The Collect used in the Offices during the week is generally the Collect from the past Sunday (unless otherwise specified). There will be a button imbedded in each office that will take you to the Collects for that particular season. Thus, for example, if it is the first week of Advent, you will use the Advent 1 Collect. However, if all this is a bit

confusing, don't worry. Just use the prayers already included in the Office and you will be fine.

Remember, while you will need to be disciplined and committed, the Offices are to be a blessing and joy. They are never to be a guilt motivated bourdon. If you forget and miss an Office, pick up with the next one when it comes around.

May God richly bless you as you join with His people in offering each day along with all its various doings to the Lord.