

Why Is the Office Divided Into Seven Hours?

****Seven times a day I have praised Thee (Ps. cxviii 164).**
These are words the prophet David spoke to our Lord.

All reasonable creatures were made to know, love, and to praise God, in order to receive endless joy. But our souls are imprisoned in our deadly (mortal) bodies. The Holy Church knowing the feebleness and frailty of her children, hath set us each day Seven Hours, to pray, for as Solomon said "that a just man falleth seven times a day" (Prov. xxiv 16) and the number of deadly sins are seven, while the Holy Church has ordained seven Sacraments, and given seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, to get remission of our sins, and to thank God for His gifts, we praise Him seven times each day. Also, God made all things in six days (Gen. ii), and fulfilled them in the seventh day and rested: therefore doing thanks to God for all His works, and for all that He made, each day we praise Him seven times. ******(excerpted from Mirror of Our Lady by Dr. Thomas Gascoigne, Chancellor of Oxford University and written between 1415 - 1450 and noted in the Little Office of the BVM by Baronius Press 2nd printing pgs. 188 - 191.)

Spiritual Benefits

Besides participating in the liturgical prayer of the Church, the Office has long been enriched by indulgences. The Catholic Encyclopedia (1917) notes that:

Pope Leo XIII granted (Nov. 17, 1887), to those who recite the **entire office**, a partial indulgence on a daily basis, **but** if recited **every day** during the month, a plenary indulgence, once a month. Partial indulgences are gained to those who recite Matins **and** Lauds only, Vespers **and** Compline only, or for any other hour recited. **Note:** the types of indulgences have been updated to reflect changes made by Pope Paul VI as of January 1, 1967.



THE LITTLE OFFICE

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OF THE
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

Origin and Brief History of the Little Office

**God Himself divinely appointed two ways in which He was to be approached in public worship - by sacrifice and by vocal prayer. In the Mosaic ritual almost all was sacrificial, and very little vocal worship was prescribed. It was not until Samuel's time that we find the choir Office established. It is not until David's time that we find vocal prayers united with the sacrificial worship in the Temple. Nearer the period of the Incarnation, Ezra re-arranged the services on the return of Judah and Benjamin from Babylon.*

When Christianity emerged from Judaism, it brought with it both word and act worship. The word from the Jewish offices and the act (since the institution of the Holy Eucharist) necessarily combined with words. The Acts of the Apostles states that while Christians were "breaking bread" daily at home, they also resorted to daily prayers at the Temple.

The origin of the different Hours of the Office have their authority in the Apostolic Constitutions, dating from the end of the second or third century, and attributed by some to St. Clement of Rome. The various hours of the liturgy along with a clear explanation of why the hours were chosen and their meaning are clearly explained in the Constitution.

The Little Office is first mentioned by the writer Saint Peter Damian, who noted that it was a devotion around the middle of the eighth century in the Benedictine Monastery of Monte Cassino. It was mandated to be recited daily along with the Divine Office by Pope Zachary (741-752). It may have been recited earlier, but that cannot be verified, because it did not come into general use before the tenth century. It remained a clerical obligation until 1568, after the Council of Trent. The Constitution on the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council added a new dimension to the Little Office; whether prayed out of obligation or out of devotion. Now classified as a liturgical prayer, those who prayed it would be participating in the official liturgy of the hours of the Church.

The Meaning of Liturgical Prayer

The Little Office of our Lady is one of the Liturgical prayers of the Church. For some religious orders, it takes the place of the greater Office known as the Divine Office. The Little Office has the same claims to be considered as part of the public official worship which the mystical Spouse of Christ, the Church, daily offers to the Divine Head.

We appear before God under three different aspects - as individuals, as members of congregations or societies, or as members of a Divine Society. Hence there are three kinds of prayer - (1) private prayer, (2) prayer in common, and (3) prayer of the Church or Liturgical prayer.

Our Lord said about private prayer: "But Thou when thou shall pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee" (Matt vi 6). This is private prayer, and Jesus promised that His Father will hear and reward it.

The second kind of prayer, which is better than private prayer is prayer in common. Jesus praised this kind of prayer when He said: "If two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by My Father who is in Heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt xviii, 19-20). When prayers are said in common, Jesus promises to those present that He will be in the midst of them, to listen, as it were, to them more attentively.

The most pleasing prayer to God is Liturgical prayer. It is the prayer we offer as members of a Divine Society, the Holy Church. The Church is a Society of the Children of God which is the Spouse of Christ. It is composed of its Triumphant section in Heaven, its Militant section on earth, and its Suffering section in Purgatory.

We should consider this Prayer of the Church as the most excellent of prayers and highly pleasing to God because: (1) they are offered by the Spouse of Christ which is always exceedingly pleasing to Him; and (2) one must consider the sentiments and the words used. The prayers of the Church are almost wholly from Holy Scripture; they express feelings inspired by the Holy Ghost Himself. Those are God's own words, and as St. Augustine says, "in order that He might be worthily praised by man, praised Himself." This was done by inspiring the words of the Psalms and the Holy Scriptures, which is almost entirely of those that the prayer of the Church consists. Therefore, these prayers are divine both in the feelings it expresses and even in the words used.

** (excerpted from an essay written by an unknown "Master of Novices" appearing in the R. & T. Washbourne edition of 1914 and noted in the Little Office of the BVM by Baronius Press 2nd printing pgs. 177-183)*