

WITH HUMBLE SPIRIT

JULY 2026

CALENDAR NOTES

JUL 3

St. Thomas the Apostle

- The GLORIA is said.

JUL 14

Kateri Tekakwitha

- **Memorial:** This is a memorial in the United States of America and should be observed.
- The complete Mass formulary can be found on the USCCB website [here](#).

JUL 22

Saint Mary Magdalene

- **FEAST:** This day was elevated to the liturgical rank of Feast in 2016. The GLORIA is said.
- A proper preface was composed and may be found [here](#).

JUL 25

St. James the Apostle

- The GLORIA is said.

JUL 28

Optional Memorial of Blessed Stanley Rother

- The Collect and other texts for the Optional Memorial of Blessed Stanley Rother may be found [here](#).
- Note: Archbishop is not giving permission to celebrate the optional memorial on the nearest Sunday.

JUL 29

Saints Martha, Mary, and Lazarus

- For more information including Mass formulary, the USCCB provides resources [here](#).

REFLECTION

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

(ON THE DIVINE OFFICE)

Prior Peter Funk, OSB

"Nothing is to be preferred to the work of God." This summarizes well the teaching that St. Benedict (ca. 480-547) left his monks regarding the liturgy, especially what we now call the Liturgy of the Hours or the Divine Office. Today, everyone in religious orders and all ordained ministers of the Church are required to pray the Office every day, and the laity are urged to join in this liturgical prayer when possible. In my experience as a monk and spiritual director of priests and seminarians, the central challenge in praying the Divine Office is how to move beyond experiencing it primarily as an obligation, so that it becomes truly life-giving prayer. What follows is mostly meant to assist priests and deacons, but should be of use also to laypersons who wish to pray the Divine Office well.

One entryway is through the words of St. Benedict that began this essay. The phrase "work of God" (opus Dei in Latin) yields more than one meaning. It can be understood as the work that we do for God. And yet, it can also mean the work that God is doing. Thanks to the Incarnation, both meanings are correct. This is the understanding taught by Vatican II: "in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 7). In fact, the saints and angels are praising God at every moment, and when we begin the Divine Office, we enter into this chorus of praise, the Church's primary activity. This is true whether we pray with others or behind the closed doors of our rooms. We are co-operators with the Son of God in praising the Father.

The obligation to pray the Office is, then, more like a standing invitation from the Holy Spirit to re-encounter the truest meaning of ourselves as adopted sons and daughters of God. It is helpful to remind ourselves of this theological backdrop whenever we take time from other activities to "plug in" to the praise that we offer as members of Christ. The Son of God is eternally rejoicing in the Holy Spirit in giving thanks to the Father (cf. Luke 10:21), and in the liturgy, we make his voice audible.

Practically Humble

Now, this realization does not magically overcome all obstacles to praying the Divine Office well. What, then, might be some practical tips for entering more devoutly into the Liturgy of the Hours? While I will enumerate several of them, the key in each case is humility. Like the Apostles, we need to ask the Lord constantly to "Teach us to pray!" (Luke 11:1). There is no shame in admitting our inadequacy—and then getting to work.

How do we prepare for the Office? Do we run into the chapel and hurriedly make the Sign of the Cross while leafing through the Breviary to find the right page? Can we instead take a few quiet moments to let go of whatever work we had been doing? Most days, we experience some tense conversations, disagreements, or disappointments. Strong emotions can contaminate mind and soul, and it is important to separate ourselves from these by forgiving and simply sitting still and quietly for a moment. The monastic fathers insist on this point: the quality of our prayer depends on what we were doing immediately before we began. A quiet mind will more readily enter into prayer. We can't prevent all distractions (and we will tackle this obstacle at the end of this essay), but we can reduce many of them by a short period of preparation before beginning.

The next important point is to make the effort to pray every word of the Office with intention. St. Bernard insisted on this for his Cistercian monks. The fact that monks need reminding of an obvious point is proof that this kind of attention is not easy. It can be easier when we slow the pace of the prayer. It can also be helpful to pray at times with others, which gives us the chance to listen rather than speak. Admittedly, part of the difficulty lies in the content of the prayers themselves, to which we now turn.

Psalms Times

The texts of the Office are taken primarily from Scripture, especially the Psalms. Sometimes the Psalms speak directly to us. At other times, the



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cultural gap between ourselves and 3,000-year-old Hebrew poetry makes it difficult to pray them in our own voices. Even if we don't understand them, God does, as do the demons. Still, the more we comprehend the texts that we pray, the more we will get out of them. It is a good practice to pray over a Psalm, or even study it, outside of the Office, to get a better sense of its meanings and how the Church has traditionally understood it. Perhaps one morning a week, we could read a Psalm (or a portion of a longer Psalm) slowly and pay close attention to its words and images, so that when it arises in the Office, its new familiarity will allow us to pray it from the heart.

Some of the interpretations that will arise from this prayer and study will be highly personal. There is no immediate problem with this, as long as our understanding harmonizes with the Church's own understanding. Sometimes, we will bring concerns from our work, from politics, and from our relationships into the prayer of the Office, especially in the Intercessions at Morning and Evening Prayer. This demonstrates that our prayer can take up all of the travails of the world, which is so much in need of a Savior.

There is a further warrant for the "personalizing" of the Psalms. It is found in a practice that goes back to the desert monks of the fourth century and was taken for granted by St. Benedict in the sixth. In the current Roman Breviary, we find what are known as the "Psalm-prayers." These appear at the end of the Psalm before the Antiphon. Strictly speaking, they are optional. The Psalm-prayer is merely a suggestion to help us to learn how to summarize the Psalm in our own prayerful words. The monks of old spent a bit of time in silence after every Psalm, so that each individual monk could add the voice of his own heart to that of the Psalm. St. Benedict cautions that this time of prayer should be brief, so as not to become self-indulgent. It is a time to discover the ways in which the words of revelation help us to understand our own situation, that we may live our lives outside of the Office with a deeper spiritual perspective.

We can work the opposite direction with the texts of the Office as well. When a line from a Psalm, Canticle, or Reading strikes you as especially important, write it down on an index card and carry it in your pocket for a few days. When I do this, I will take it out and read it every so often, and it becomes my prayer at the moment. This allows Scripture to interpret what is presently happening in my life, strengthening the connection between life and prayer. It makes God's Word my constant companion, a bulwark against temptation and isolation.

As an example, I have often used the line "Guide my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11) in this way. When I am faced with a temptation or a difficult decision, I can recite this verse to myself as a moral anchor. It places me before God in a position of humility with a reticence to follow my own intuitions. I am reminded that I will have to answer to God for my decisions and so to seek the counsel of the Holy Spirit.

Demon Distraction

Now let us, at last, turn to a difficulty that attacks anyone who wishes to pray. Perhaps the most consistent concern that crops up among the early monks is that of distractions. When it is time to pray, we are very often hit with a host of distractions, what St. Athanasius called the "dust cloud of considerations." People and conversations I haven't thought of in years suddenly seem like urgent concerns. Out of the blue, curiosity about some half-remembered bit of popular culture makes me anxious to run a Google search on the monastery phone.

The first and most important lesson here is that this is the common experience of all who wish to take prayer seriously. This is the heart of spiritual warfare, so we may as well get used to it and prepare ourselves properly. We do not stand out in any way because we experience distractions; it is part of being human.

One of the first principles of dealing with distractions is not to allow them to dishearten us. Normally, the best approach to distractions is simply to set the distracting thought aside, gently, and then go back to focusing on the words of the Office. Yes, we will miss

some of the meaning of the Psalms, and yes, we should experience a certain contrition for this, but in no way should we allow it to cause us anxiety. We will pray these Psalms again, and perhaps we will eventually learn how better not to be led astray—sometime in the future. Becoming upset about distractions is the best way to allow them to triumph over us.

When I first entered monastic life, my cell door didn't shut properly. One of the cats liked to push on the door, enter, and jump on my lap while I was trying to pray. At first, this annoyed me. Then I realized that her actions were very much like distractions. When she jumped in my lap, I gently set her down on the ground, no matter how many times she returned. Eventually, she would give up. Distractions are often like that. The demons are throwing thoughts at us to see what will stick. If a thought doesn't stick, they usually stop that line of attack after a while, and we get a few moments of peace.

Occasionally, distractions can be useful. If a thought keeps dogging me during prayer, it may be a sign of an unresolved conflict in my own heart. I may need to make a mental note of it, so that I can bring it to prayer later in private. Perhaps the very words of the liturgy have dislodged this previously hidden conflict so that it now can come to my attention. Even if this turns out to be the case, the moment to examine this specific distraction is not during the Office, and so the thought should be gently set aside like all other distractions. The main difference is that we might profitably return to that thought later.

After all, the thoughts that we are seeking to cultivate while praying the Office are precisely those given by the Church. They are not all going to reflect how we happen to feel at the moment. When we are doing well, the laments in the Office can be prayed for those who are struggling and can't find their own words. When we are struggling, the words of praise can be prayed for those whom God has blessed but have, like the nine lepers, forgotten to give thanks.

Power of Submission

This self-denial involved in the struggle to bring our thoughts into line with God's thoughts brings us back, finally, to humility. The liturgy is not our own; it belongs to us only inasmuch as God, in his infinite love and compassion, has chosen us to participate in his great mission of redemption. It is a mission that we can't ever fully comprehend. We do not determine its contours, scope, or timeline. We can, however, gradually gain insight into God's plan through the pedagogy offered by the liturgy. Our insight will develop to the extent that we give ourselves over patiently to the method found there. Christ's voice will gradually be incarnate in our words and actions, so that we can say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). This marvelous realization may well help us to overcome many obstacles in our resistance to prayer so that we might manifest God's holiness, in spite of whatever limitations we have.

To him be glory forever!

[Accessible online at adoremus.org](https://www.adoremus.org)

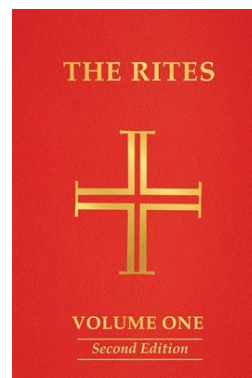
RESOURCES

THE RITES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: VOLUME ONE, SECOND EDITION
Liturgical Press, 2026

In one convenient volume, a new edition of a classic collection of major liturgical texts, reflecting recent updates and perfect for study and reference.

[PURCHASE ONLINE](#)

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