

Tips for Praying the Daily Office

The Daily Office, while appearing in somewhat different forms, is an ancient pattern of prayer and scripture reading. In the Anglican/Episcopal tradition, Morning and Evening Prayer are the main services which comprise the Office (Noonday Prayer and Compline are other, shorter, secondary services).

One of the best explanations as to why a formal pattern of the Office is important and helpful comes from the Anglican priest and writer Kenneth Leech:

"The idea of some set form of Office... is based on a realistic assessment of human beings and of our prayer potential. We do not always pray with spontaneity and ease, nor should our prayer depend on the way we feel. Prayer which is so based on feelings is unstable and lacks depth. The Office is a form of prayer which is independent of our feelings, though, of course it is often accompanied by, and arouses, deep feelings and emotion." (*True Prayer*, pp. 187-188)

Some Tips for Praying the Office:

1. Pray as you can, not as you can't—find a pattern and rhythm that works for you, one size does not necessarily fit all. Some prefer contemporary language, some traditional. Some find it easier to pray in the morning or evening. Some find that versions of the Office from other parts of the world or times past are more beneficial.
2. Once you find the pattern that works, stick with it—the pattern of reading scripture is often different in various forms of the Office—by consistently following one track, you will read through the entirety (or majority) of scripture on a regular basis (often every two years).
3. Seek to pray whether you feel like it or not. Emotions can be helpful servants of prayer, but they're usually terrible masters. Some days you just won't feel like praying. And it is on these days that the fixed pattern of the Office is most helpful.
4. Be kind and forgiving with yourself—the Daily Office is all about marinating yourself in prayer, scripture and worship—it's not about saying exactly the right number of prayers or trying to be a "Super" Christian.

5. If for some reason you get off track, don't try to play "catch up." Simply jump back in the stream and continue on.

6. Remember that the Daily Office allows you to join your prayers with those of fellow Christians. This is a vitally important aspect with several corollaries:

a. While individual faith and relationship with God are of vital importance, we are part of the larger body of Christ.

b. That's why the language of the office is usually first person plural, "we" not "I." If it feels strange to pray "we" by yourself, remember that you are praying in union with countless other Christians around the world.

c. The sun truly never sets on the Church of Jesus Christ. Your daily prayers join with those of others in other time zones to weave a continuous tapestry of prayer and praise to God, one that never ceases. In the beautiful words of the hymn:

"We thank thee that thy Church, unsleeping
while earth rolls onward into light
through all the world her watch is keeping
and rests not now by day or night.
As o'er each continent and island
the dawn leads on another day,
the voice of prayer is never silent,
nor dies the strain of praise away."

John Ellerton, Hymn 24, *The Hymnal 1982*