

# THE LION

May 2006 Vol. CXXXI, No. 5

An Unofficial Newsletter for Members Only of  
Saint Mark's Parish, Denver, Colorado

## THE MONASTIC DIURNAL Some Frequently Asked Questions

### ☞ What on earth is the Monastic Diurnal?

**T**HE *Monastic Diurnal* (“MD”) is a liturgical book for the Western Rite. It contains the texts necessary for the celebration of most of the traditional Divine Office of the Western Church.

It is called “Monastic” because the form of the Office it contains is that which was celebrated for centuries in monasteries, from the time of Saint Benedict of Nursia, the Patriarch of Western Monasticism (c. 480 – 543). Benedict, in his famous Rule, described the details of how he wanted his monks to celebrate the Divine Office, which he called the “*Opus Dei*” (“the work of God”).

The word “Diurnal” derives from the Latin word *diurnalis*, meaning, “of, or pertaining to, the day.” The traditional Divine Office is composed of eight parts, celebrated at different times. First, there is “Matins” or “Nocturns,” which is a long night office composed of psalms, lessons and prayers. And then there are the Seven “Day Hours” – Lauds, Prime (first hour), Terce (third hour), Sext (sixth hour), None (ninth hour), Vespers, and Compline. So, this book is called a “Diurnal” because it contains only the Seven Day Hours, *not* the midnight office of Matins.

### ☞ How does a Diurnal differ from a Breviary?

Quite simply, a Breviary has all of the parts necessary for the whole Divine Office, including Matins. The Diurnal does not contain Matins. The absence of the materials for the long and complicated Office of Matins makes the Diurnal a very compact and handy book (as opposed to a Breviary, which is usually split up into four large volumes).

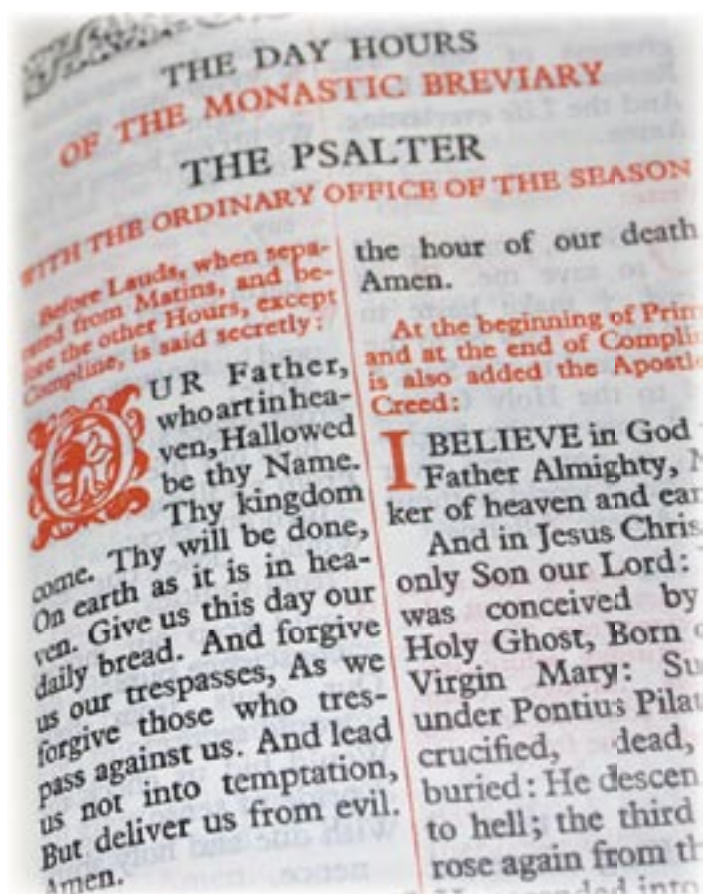
☞ **Isn't it just for monks or nuns?** Well, the MD was obviously designed for Benedictine monks and nuns. The form of prayer contained in the MD is definitely monastic, having been designed by Saint Benedict for his monasteries. However, this doesn't mean that others, including secular clergy and laymen, can't make use of the MD in

their own prayer life or spiritual development. Many non-monastic clergy and laymen find that praying some or all of the Hours from the MD gives their life a profound sense of peace, spiritual structure and discipline.

☞ **I like Matins and Evensong from the Prayer Book. Why do we need the Diurnal?** First of all, it should be noted that parochial English Matins and Evensong historically come from the old Hours as prayed by English monastics before the Reformation. English “Morning Prayer” or “Matins” is really a simplification and combination of elements from the old monastic Matins (Nocturns), Lauds and Prime. Likewise, English “Evening Prayer” or “Evensong” comes from the old monastic Vespers and Compline.

While not strictly required, it is very appropriate and desirable in our Western Rite Orthodox churches for the very “bare-bones” outlines of parochial Matins and Evensong to be supplemented with elements from the older Divine Office. For instance, one can very easily “plug-in” the Antiphons on *Benedictus* or *Magnificat*, and the Office Hymns, both in private recitation and in public celebration.

☞ **Isn't this an Anglican or Roman Catholic book? Should Orthodox Christians use it?** The Benedictine Monastic Divine Office, obviously, was preserved down



through the centuries by Roman Catholic Benedictine monks. And many Anglicans, particularly as a result of the revival of the religious life within Anglicanism, adopted the Benedictine Monastic Office, and put out English editions for use by English-speaking Anglicans.

But the Benedictine Divine Office is not merely “Roman Catholic” or “Anglican” because it is a venerable, ancient form of prayer which predates the tragic separation of these bodies from the Orthodox Church by many centuries. The development of the Western Divine Office began in the very earliest years of the Church’s life after Pentecost, and it developed into its essential, distinct form by the time of Saints Benedict and Gregory the Great (both venerable Orthodox Saints).

So, despite the fact that Western Rite Orthodox often use liturgical books printed by Roman Catholics and Anglicans, we can be assured that these books, including the MD (despite later changes and interpolations) contain perfectly Orthodox forms of prayer, having their origin in the ancient Orthodox Churches of the West. The Orthodox Church now blesses the use of these Roman and Anglican editions for her Western Rite children, so long as they are instructed as to how to use these books in accordance with Orthodox doctrine and practice.

**☞ If I don’t pray with the Diurnal, does that mean that I’m not as good a Christian as those that do?** Absolutely not. If you have not taken monastic vows, you are obviously not bound to the daily recitation of the monastic Hours. While it is the duty for every Orthodox Christian to have at least morning and evening prayers, the MD is simply one way, one option, of making these prayers. While praying with the MD is highly suggested and has been a source of great spiritual consolation and strength to many, it is not to be seen as a requirement of any non-monastic Christian whatsoever.

**☞ Why are there so many Hours of prayer? What do they mean?** The following article in this newsletter, by Pius Parsch, should explain some of the symbolism of the different Hours. As with a lot of questions in the Church, there are historical reasons (having to do with the development of the Divine Office), as well as theological or symbolic reasons. When Benedict discussed the number of the Hours, he simply pointed to the Divine pattern shown to us by God through the Psalmist: “*Seven times a day do I praise thee*” (Psalm 119:164, referring to the Day Hours), and “*At midnight will I rise to give thanks unto thee*” (Psalm 119:62, referring to Matins).

**☞ Do I have to pray all of the Hours?** No. Again, if you are not bound by monastic vows, then the MD is entirely optional. If you do decide to make use of the MD, the first rule of thumb is *to be realistic* about your abilities and your state in life. If you are a full time parent, or a “9 to 5” worker, you cannot seriously pretend that you can pray all of the Hours like a monk or nun. You may be able to handle it for a few days or a week, but eventually reality will catch up with you, and you may become discouraged. So it’s best to start with a very humble prayer rule, get into the habit of following this rule daily, and then, once you have mastered this simple rule, you may want to gradually expand it.

If your state in life allows you to do so, you could pray all seven of the Day Hours. Some folks might find it possible to pray all of the Hours at their “ideal” times (see below). Perhaps, more realistically, some may find it easier to pray the Hours “in aggregate” (for instance: Lauds and Prime together in the morning; Terce, Sext, and None in the middle of the day; and Vespers and Compline in the evening).

However, most laypeople will only be able to pray some of the Hours, perhaps only one. There are several possibilities here. The most important Hours are Lauds and Vespers, and many people will find these to be suitable morning and evening devotions. Still others may find Prime and Compline, as shorter morning and evening prayer forms, more suitable. Maybe some folks will find it possible to pray *both* Lauds and Prime in the morning, and *both* Vespers and Compline in the evening. Maybe mornings and evenings are way too hectic, and there is a peaceful time in the middle of the day for one or more of the Little Hours (Terce, Sext, or None). Maybe your only peaceful time of day is right before bed, and you can only handle Compline.

**☞ When are the different Day Hours prayed?** Well, there are “ideal” times and then there are the more “realistic” times that you will have to find for yourself, should you want to take up the recitation of some or all of the Day Hours. There are no “hard and fast” rules for the “realistic” times: you will have to discover, basically, what works for you, considering your state in life.

The first Day Hour, Lauds, in monastic communities, is traditionally prayed very early in the morning, right before dawn. The idea is that the dawning of the sun should coincide with our recitation of the Canticle *Benedictus*, which greets Christ the divine Sun of Righteousness as “the Day-spring from on high.” If you pray Lauds privately, it is best to do so as early as possible, after you get up and before you have your breakfast. Realistically, you should set aside about 30 minutes for Lauds.

Prime (the “first hour”) is ideally prayed some time after Lauds, before the big work of the day starts, perhaps around 6 or 7 AM. If you pray Lauds, it might be good to pray it together with Prime in the early morning, “in aggregate.” Prime will take about 10, at the most, 15 minutes.

The Little Hours – Terce, Sext, and None – are ideally prayed separate from one another, at around 9 AM, 12 noon, and 3 PM respectively. It may be a good idea to choose only one of these Little Hours, perhaps Sext, which you can pray at noon. Or, if you like, it might be possible to pray all three of these Hours in aggregate sometime in the middle of the day.

Vespers is ideally prayed sometime around sunset. For a layman, it may be possible to find some time to pray Vespers before supper. Or it may be possible to pray both Vespers and Compline together, sometime after supper (although it is wise not to wait too long, since the later it gets, the harder it will be to concentrate on your prayers). You should set aside around 20-30 minutes to pray Vespers.

Compline is the bedtime office. It is supposed to be the last thing a monk or nun does before he retires each evening. It is a short Office, and you should set aside around 10 minutes for it. There should be no problem saying it just before you go to bed, but some people may find it desirable to pray Vespers and Compline in aggregate, sometime in the evening.

**☞ It’s so complicated! How can I possibly learn how to use it?** Admittedly, the traditional Divine Office is a complex system of psalms, prayers and hymns. The Divine Office is always overwhelming to beginners. It is not exactly intuitive, and it takes a lot of work to figure it out.

If you are brand new to the MD, you may just want to begin with the simplest possible Hour: Compline. It has the least amount of daily or seasonal variation. It always has the same psalms, the same hymn, and the same prayers, day in and day out. When you become a “pro” at praying Compline, then you might be bold enough to take on other of the Hours.

While it is far beyond the scope of this article to provide a complete instruction manual on the MD, suffice it to say that the key to figuring out the other Hours is understanding (1) the structure of the Church Year (Sundays, Feasts and Ferias) and (2) how this structure is reflected in each individual Hour and in the different sections of the Diurnal. Your “homebase” will always be the Psalter section of the MD. The Psalter contains the outline and the ordinary parts of each Hour, arranged according to the day of the week.

Depending on what kind of day it is (Sunday, Feast, or Feria) you will have to weave certain elements from the other parts of the MD into the ordinary outline of each Hour. These parts are called either “proper” (from the Proper of the Season and the Proper of the Saints) or “common” (from the Common of the Saints). And so, each individual Hour on a given day will be composed of Ordinary, Proper and/or Common elements. The trick is how to blend them all together according to the kalendar and the rubrics.

Above all, if you want to master the MD, you will need a lot of courage, patience and hope. Admittedly, there is a considerable learning curve, but in the end, it’s worth it!

**☞ OK, so where can I get a Diurnal?** The Antiochian Western Rite Vicariate, since its inception, has made use of the English edition edited by Canon Charles Winfred Douglas. It was first printed between 1932 and 1963 by Oxford University Press. The last 1963 edition has recently been reprinted by Lancelot Andrewes Press. This edition of the MD was meant to be used by members of the Anglican Communion, and its use at one time was very widespread in that Communion, not only among religious but also among secular clergy and laymen. The Antiochian Orthodox Western Rite Vicariate has endorsed the use of this edition for her clergy and faithful, so long as the text is used carefully in accordance with the Vicariate’s kalendar and liturgical standards. For more information on obtaining this MD, see the advertisement in this newsletter, or visit this website: [www.andrewespress.com](http://www.andrewespress.com).

**☞ Where can I get some help in learning how to use the Diurnal?** If you have e-mail, you are more than welcome to join the “Diurnal” e-mail list (hosted by Yahoo! Groups). Questions relating to the use of the MD may be sent to the group, which consists of different MD users, who range from beginners to MD veterans. Members of the list will receive a weekly electronic “Ordo” (in PDF format), prepared by the moderator, with detailed directions on the daily recitation of the Hours from the MD, according to the kalendar of the Antiochian Orthodox Western Rite. Though the moderator and many of the members belong to the Western Rite within the Orthodox Church, the list is open to all Christians who pray with the MD.

If you would like to join this “Diurnal” e-mail list, visit the website: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/diurnal/> You will have to open a free account, with a sign-in and password, in order to join the group, to receive and send group e-mails, and to access to all of the group’s helpful tutorial files. If you need help joining the group, e-mail the moderator at [venite@mac.com](mailto:venite@mac.com). §

# THE CANONICAL HOURS

Father Pius Parsch

From *Der Wochenpsalter des Römischen Breviers*; Adapted from translation in *The Hours of the Divine Office in English and Latin* (Liturgical Press, 1964)

**T**HE Church lives in time and with time. This truth is brought out beautifully in the canonical hours. They provide a perfect way to consecrate the whole day to God and make it holy. The admonition of our Lord, that we are to pray and not grow weary, is thus perfectly fulfilled. For every part of the day the Church has drawn up a special prayer-form, an hour, as it is called, that corresponds to the particular need of that time of the day. The day is like a journey through an arid desert, but every three hours we come upon an oasis that offers us the water of grace and the cool refreshing shade of heavenly assistance. Spiritually we may revive ourselves at the canonical hours of prayer.

In order to understand what these divisions of the day are supposed to mean, it would be well to take a brief but thorough look into the history of their development. In the early centuries of the Church, in addition to the celebration of Mass, it was customary to hold a so-called vigil, which was a prayer service in three parts, on the night before a feast day. From this vigil service developed three of our canonical hours: Vespers, Matins, Lauds, inasmuch as the first was prayed the preceding evening, and the last was held in the early hours of the morning. This was the arrangement already in the days of Hippolytus (†236) and these were the first “hours.” In the Roman office the threefold division of Matins was re-introduced even after the vigil service had split into Vespers, Matins, and Lauds, and the divisions came to be known as nightwatches or nocturns.

Corresponding to the three nocturns of Matins there are three daytime hours, Terce, Sext, and None. This makes

three nocturns or nightwatches, three day hours, morning prayer (Lauds) and evening prayer (Vespers). The whole day is thereby sanctified in its principal divisions. There are and always have been Christians who actually pray these “hours” at their corresponding times.

The two remaining hours were added later, under the influence of monasticism. The monks prayed Matins during the night and said Lauds (morning prayer) in the early dawn, then went back to bed. When they rose later to begin the day’s work, they felt the need for some common service to consecrate their labors to the Lord. Thus they developed Prime, a sort of second morning prayer. Vespers (evening prayer) were said in late afternoon, and then at bedtime there were devotions in the sleeping quarters (lessons, chapter of faults, abbot’s blessing), which developed into Compline, a sort of second night prayer. With the addition of Compline, the development of the canonical hours came to an end ...

The next point is how to make these canonical hours practical for personal spiritual progress. The breviary ought to be a principal guide for my spiritual outlook and a means to sanctify my entire day’s activity. This calls for the fullest possible application of the scheme of the hours of the Divine Office. The hours can best be appreciated by exploring them one by one, in an effort to determine what is the characteristic sentiment and theme of each, and as far as possible, how certain ones of them reflect various mysteries in the story of salvation.

The theme of a canonical hour is that special thought or motivation to prayer that arises from the needs of that time of day: it is the hour’s prayer intention. The background from the story of salvation is the mystery or event which bears upon the hour and should enter into the prayer intention while the hour is being prayed; it should be an illustration for the text of the prayer, to channel and intensify the spirit of devotion (e.g., Terce – descent of the Holy Spirit).



**MATINS.** It is night. The turmoil of day has died away and everything is still. The Church is at prayer. She remembers the night-time prayer of her Bridegroom; she thinks of the night vigils of the early Christians in the catacombs. Times have changed, but the Church continues to insist that night is not just for sleep; night is a time for prayer. From the earliest ages Matins was the Church's prayer for the Second Coming; she prayed and waited for the return of Christ as Judge of all the world. Night is also a symbol of life on earth. We are like the virgins in the parable, waiting for the Bridegroom with our lamps in hand ...

Unfortunately, we have to admit that today Matins retains its proper theme only to a very slight degree – Matins is generally very loosely connected with the night hours and thus it can equally well be anticipated, that is, prayed on the day before, without any appreciable loss of devotion. In place of a theme proper to the time of day there is generally some theme from the feast being celebrated that day, a theme which is expressed in the readings (or lessons, as they called) and the other variable parts. On feast days, Matins is a meditation on the feast, a drama of prayer ...

**LAUDS.** Lauds is a jubilant hour, fresh as the morning dew, perhaps the most beautiful of all the hours. Its symbolism deserves attention. It is night; nature and men are asleep. In the far east the grey of dawn appears; then the ruddy hue of morning, the harbinger of a new day, spreads across the horizon, and the world of nature begins to stir. But all this natural beauty is only a symbol and reminder of a most wonderful event in the story of salvation. It was at this beautiful hour that our Savior burst the bonds of death. *Resurrection* – that is the background theme of Lauds. And the two pictures together, dawn and resurrection, remind us of a third arising from slumber, the spiritual awakening of the human soul.

There is, then, a threefold resurrection: nature awakens, the Savior rises from the dead, the human soul celebrates its spiritual resurrection. Such is the background to our prayer of Lauds. It is an explicit song of praise; praise is the hour's central theme. If we can get a feeling for these three pictures intermingling in our Lauds prayer, if we can enlist the forces of nature to pray and praise and exult along with us while reciting this hour reasonably early in the morning, perhaps even in the open air, then we are certain to be struck by the full impact of its meaning.

Very frequently we find nature themes in the psalms. The thoughts of Christ's resurrection occur mostly in the antiphons at Lauds, where there is almost always an *Alleluia*. This feature we can observe particularly in Sunday Lauds, Sunday being the liturgical commemoration of the

resurrection. The liturgical day and the liturgical hour of the resurrection coincide, and the references to Easter Day are doubled and tripled.

The climax of Lauds is the Gospel song, the *Benedictus*. It is a hymn in praise of man's redemption, a greeting to the dawning day of salvation which is destined to be one more step toward its completion. It is the Church who prays the *Benedictus*, taking Zachary's place. Every day is a new coming of the Redeemer, and the Church greets her Savior as the "rising light of day, the divine Sun."

Sunday and feast-day Lauds are classically beautiful. First the praises of awakening nature before God the King upon His throne, the earth, decked with all the wonders of creation, Victor over the primeval chaos (Ps. 92 [93]); then a pious man in procession to the sanctuary (Ps. 99 [100]); morning prayer ("the bride-soul's morning kiss for the divine Bridegroom" – Ps. 62 [63]); finally a joyous exclamation over the works of God's hands and the great symphony of praise that echoes through the *Benedicite* and *Laudate* [Pss. 148-150].

**PRIME.** Prime is the Church's second morning prayer, quite different in tone from Lauds. Lauds is the ideal morning prayer, a "resurrection song" of all creation and of the Church. Prime is the morning prayer of a sinful human, a subjective prayer. The basic theme of Prime is dedication of and preparation for the day's labors and conflicts. This theme runs through the whole hour.

There is no special reference to any chapter in the story of salvation. Thus, the theme of the canonical hour, *preparing for the day*, assumes the center of attention, and indeed to such an extent that even on feast days, themes proper to the feast are generally suppressed at Prime. The hymn at Prime enlists all our efforts and abilities in the service of the Lord and arms us against imminent dangers – perfectly in harmony with Prime's basic theme ...

**TERCE.** (9 o'clock). The Church wants us to pause briefly during our day's activity and raise our hearts to God; that is the purpose underlying the little hours. They are a chance to catch our breath, an oasis in our desert wanderings. It is important that we do not pray them all at once, but whenever possible we should pray them at the corresponding hour of the day as a renewed consecration of the day's work. The little hours are short, because the day is for work.

The story of salvation has a role to play in Terce: it was the third hour (9:00) when the Holy Spirit came down upon the young Christian community on Pentecost Sunday (Pentecost Terce begins with the hymn, *Veni Creator*).

Quite appropriately, the Church recalls this mystery in the hour of Terce: Terce is thus the “first Confirmation,” a strengthening for the conflicts of the day. It is a “Come, Holy Spirit” upon the day’s work. The hour’s theme is invocation of the Holy Spirit. The hymns proper to the little hours are a further development of the theme proper to each and to the corresponding time of day.

**SEXT.** (12 noon). Theme of the hour: The day’s conflict is at its climax, the heat of passion is at its strongest, the powers of hell have greater influence over man, our lower nature seems to have gained mastery. Theme from the story of salvation: the Savior is hanging on the Cross (12:00 to 3:00); hell is bringing all its forces to bear against Him. This scene from Good Friday is the background for Sext; foreground is the battle against sin in us and in the Church. “Lead us not into temptation” is the message of this hour.

**NONE.** (3:00 to 6:00). This day of salvation is slowly beginning its decline. Our thoughts are taken up with the end of life. Looking to my future I ask: will I persevere? Perseverance is the hour’s theme. There is no theme from the story of salvation. At the most there is eschatological shading – the last things.

**VESPERS.** Vespers is the Church’s evening prayer. It is very similar to Lauds, both in construction and in basic theme. The Church looks back on the day of salvation just passed with all its redeeming graces – and is fervently grateful. Vespers is a thanksgiving prayer. Thanksgiving is the principal theme: the *Magnificat* is the climax, *the* great thanksgiving song of the Church. The canonical-hour theme is this: thanks be to God for the day just passed, both in the soul and in the Church, thanks for all His saving graces.

There is also a theme from the story of salvation to be found in Vespers – the Last Supper. At the very same time that Vespers is prayed, Christ was seated with His apostles in the upper room. This gives Vespers a special connection with the holy Eucharist, and as a matter of fact, a great number of the Vesper psalms are Eucharistic songs or at least can easily be referred to the Eucharist. This is particularly true of the so-called Hallel psalms (Psalms 112-117 [113-118]), which were sung at the Last Supper, and the Gradual psalms (Psalms 119-131 [120-132]), which were procession songs for pilgrimages to the temple. The Last Supper is itself a symbol of the heavenly banquet.

There is one big difference between Vespers and Lauds: whereas the psalms of Lauds are all specially chosen songs, the Vesper psalms merely follow a numerical sequence in

the psalter. They are not a series of thanksgiving hymns exclusively, as perhaps we might have expected.

**COMPLINE.** Compline is the Church’s second evening prayer, and, as opposed to Vespers, it is a subjective and individual prayer for the sinful soul who wants to make her peace with God. The hour is a masterpiece of construction, the work of Saint Benedict; we might call it the ideal night prayer.

Particularly beautiful is the symbolism of Compline ... Light and sun are favorite Scriptural and liturgical symbols of God, Christ, the divine life. Christ is the divine Sun, the Christian is a child of the Sun. These thoughts are to be found frequently in the hours. But also the opposite of light, night and darkness, is a frequent symbol for the sinister powers of hell. It is this night theme that sets the tone for all of Compline. In darkness we recognize the element of the devil; night is the cloak for the prince of this world. The child of God, being a creature of light, is afraid of the night. Like a tiny chick he huddles beneath his mother’s wings; there he is safe from the attacks of the hawk, Satan.

It is important to notice that our liturgical prayer thinks not only of ourselves, but of all our fellow men: for them too it is evening now, an evening of temptation, sin, death. It is a matter of experience for all of us that the devil particularly likes to use the hours of the night for setting the snares of his temptations. It is almost as if hell were depopulated every evening and hosts of evil spirits came as agents of sin to plague the earth. How many sins does not night cover with her thick black veil! The religious soul prays this night prayer for his own protection from the powers of darkness, and for all souls, everywhere.

Sleep, too, is a symbol, an image of death. Spontaneously we think of death when we go to sleep – Compline is also a night prayer to life, a plea for a happy death. It is precisely in this setting that it contains some splendid thoughts. The short and meaningful blessing at the beginning of Compline expresses the double application of the night prayer very concisely: “May the almighty Lord grant us a peaceful night and a perfect end.” The background from the story of salvation is the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane; we pray Compline for the Gethsemane hours in our life ...

Then our night prayer dies slowly away. A few versicles, the blessing of the heavenly Father in the blessing of the father of our religious family. Thereupon a parting adieu to our heavenly mother, Mary, one of the Marian antiphons, each more beautiful than the preceding. No further sound from the choir. The “great silence” has begun. §