

LEARN TO PRAY THE DAILY OFFICE

a step-by-step guide by the Rev. Matthew E. Brench

So you've heard about the Daily Office, specifically the Anglican tradition of daily prayer and scripture reading, and you want to enter into this beautiful and formative tradition? Great, grab a prayer book and go! Except, maybe someone already said that and you don't know where to start... or worse, you *did* try it and it was just too much? The length of the Office was overwhelming and the contents too complicated to navigate when you've got no experience with liturgy. We understand, we've all been at that place before! Some just don't remember it as well as others.

Diving into the full Prayer Book life of worship doesn't work for everyone; sometimes you have to work your way up toward that discipline, adding one piece at a time as you grow comfortable with each feature and learn how to "do" them all. This post series is basically a twelve-step program to help you advance in the life of disciplined prayer from zero to super-Anglican. The pace is up to you – the goal of this sort of spiritual discipline is *consistency*, not "how much" you do.

Note: This guide uses the 2019 Book of Common Prayer, as set out by the Anglican Church in North America.

Step One: Pray a Psalm followed by the Lord's Prayer.

Step Two: Add a Scripture Reading

Step Three: Add more Psalms and Lessons

Step Four: Add the Apostles' Creed

Step Five: Add Canticles

Step Six: Add the Confession

Step Seven: Add some Prayers

Step Eight: Add the Invitatory

Step Nine: Add the Collect of the Day

Step Ten: Add the Closing Prayers

Step Eleven: Supplement it with Occasional Prayers

Step Twelve: Supplement it with Hymnody

Step One: Pray a Psalm followed by the Lord's Prayer.

Every morning and evening do two things: pray one Psalm (or perhaps part of one, if it's really long), and follow it up with the Lord's Prayer. If you've been a Christian for a while, you've probably memorized the latter, but if you haven't, use it in the 2019 Prayer Book on page 21. The Lord's Prayer was taught by Jesus (hence the name *the Lord's prayer*), and is a pretty straight-forward thing to pray. There is much about it that can be studied deeply, analyzing its words and structure, just like any other biblical text, but it's also just readily understandable and easy to pray as your own prayer.

What may be more challenging is praying the psalms. While this is a basic spiritual practice going back thousands of years, it is a tragically lost art for many (if not most) Protestant Christians today. People "know" that the psalms are song-prayers, but actually praying them is a foreign concept. If we are to be faithful to the Scriptures, though, we *must* pray the psalms, rather than simply read or study them. They were written to be prayed, individually and corporately, so failure to do so is failure to receive the authoritative scriptures in their fullness.

So how does one learn to pray the psalms?

1. Read the Psalm(s) out loud.
2. Once you're used to the content of the Psalm(s) in question, imagine you and Jesus are reading them together.
3. Imagine you and Jesus are reading them together *to God the Father*.
4. Imagine you and Jesus and *the entire Church* are reading them together to God the Father.

The key realizations that will click over time (not necessarily in this order) are:

1. that sometimes the content of the psalm will give voice to the cry of your own heart and sometimes it will not
2. that there are many "voices" in the Psalms, and if it isn't yours personally it may be those of Jesus, or of the Church, or of the martyrs, etc.
3. that the psalms are incredibly influential in the writing of many other prayers, collects, suffrages, litanies, and so forth.

Perhaps even your own extemporaneous prayers will start to use psalm-like language; but remember **the goal is not memorization**. If some of that happens along the way, that's awesome. But the goal is *to be familiar with the psalms* so they can work through your heart as you read them, not just process their information like in a bible study.

As for which psalms to pray, it may be best to start out with following the "60 Day Psalter" provided in our Daily Office Lectionary on pages 738-763. For sake of getting used to this practice, I'd recommend you invest in using the Prayer Book's psalter, but we'll revisit that subject later.

Summary

So if you're learning the Daily Office from scratch, start by praying a Psalm (*out loud!*) every morning and evening, followed by the Lord's Prayer. Then, if you have other requests or thanksgivings to offer to God, add them in your own words. It may take a while to get used to praying the psalms, so make sure you're comfortable with this before moving on to Step Two.

Step Two: Add a Scripture Reading

With the daily rounds of psalm-praying every morning and evening in place, it is time to start reading the Bible too. The Evangelical mentality may balk at this order – why not *start* with bible-readings and then add prayers? This can be answered in a couple different ways:

1. The Psalms *are* from the Bible, as is the Lord's Prayer, so Step One was already completely biblical.
2. Historically, most people didn't learn to read, so Bible-reading was never really an option; instead they relied on what they could memorize – psalms to sing!
3. The daily office is, first, a discipline of prayer. We need to focus on the prayer before we move on to include “study”.

So once your psalm-praying is consistently in place, it's time to put in a Lesson (a reading from the Bible) between that Psalm and the Lord's Prayer. Since you're working toward the daily office tradition, you should start with a part of the Daily Office Lectionary. Pick one reading “track” for Morning Prayer and one for Evening Prayer and stick to them. It'd be best to make sure that one is Old Testament and the other is New Testament. Eventually you'll be reading from both the OT and the NT in both morning and evening, but you're pacing yourself. Get used to one reading first. Depending upon your background and experience you may find some of our Lessons (especially from the Old Testament) to be rather longer than you're used to.

You may be tempted, as you read, to look up what individual words mean, or who individual people are, or whatnot. *Resist such interruptions.* Finish the reading, round it off with the Lord's Prayer to complete the Office, and then go look things up if you need to. The Daily Office is not a Bible Study, it's a time of devotion and prayer; the reading of Scripture in the Office is not (historically) followed up by an expository sermon, preaching usually lands in a different liturgical context. Rather, these scripture lessons are *first* for exposure and *second* for familiarity. If you endeavor to study everything you read, from the very start of your devotional-reading journey, then you may get lost in the details and end up swamped and discouraged. Receive what you understand and pass along by what you don't understand. It may be that you will find the answer to your question in the next chapter, or in another part of the Bible. Honestly it takes a couple read-throughs of the Bible to begin to develop a memorable sense of its scope and contents, so it isn't fair to put too much pressure on yourself too soon.

Summary

It's only step two and you've already got an identifiable “Office of Prayer” in place: pray a psalm, read a scripture lesson, and close with the Lord's Prayer. In a sense, everything that follows from here is an expansion upon this basic kernel.

Step Three: Add more Psalms and Lessons

If all's going well, your twice-daily round of praying a psalm and reading a scripture lesson has increased your appetite for both. Individuals may well find more comfort and affinity with one of those over the other, but as you grow into the Daily Office tradition there's still more of both to add. When you're consistently covering one Psalm and Lesson each morning and evening, it's time to add a second Lesson and additional Psalms to each Office. You will be reading all the Lessons in the Daily Office Lectionary, and it's probably time also to upgrade from the 60-day Psalter to the Anglican standard monthly psalter.

The monthly psalter is outlined in a table that is provided on page 735, just before the Daily Office Lectionary begins, but the Psalms themselves are also in the Prayer Book, on starting on page 270. If you weren't before, it's time to start using the Prayer Book Psalter. Even though you're reading from a Bible, there are a few reasons to prefer the Prayer Book for the Psalms:

1. The Prayer Book Psalter clearly marks out where the psalms for each Office begin (every morning and evening for each day of the month, read sequentially).
2. The Prayer Book Psalter translation is intentionally poetic and beautiful, which cannot be said about any mainstream Bible translation. The ESV or NASB may be the best translations for study, but we're here to pray the psalms, not analyze them. (Not that you can't study the psalms of course, it's just that the Office is time of prayer.)
3. Using the Prayer Book is a useful skill that you will be developing bit by bit from here on.

Logistically, what you probably want to do at this point is different from how the Office in its full form will work. Ultimately, all these Psalms will be prayed in a row before the Lessons, and there will be different things after each reading. But for now, start in the psalms for the morning and evening and save the last one or two to pray *between* the two Lessons, or perhaps *after both* Lessons.

The point of interspersing the Psalms with the Lessons is to provide a little distance between the two readings. In the Daily Office Lectionary the readings are just moving sequentially through the Bible independently of one another, so by stopping to pray a Psalm after the first lesson you "clear your mind" a little bit before reading the next lesson. You don't want to conflate them in your head and attempt to link them together artificially; that's not how a Daily lectionary works. Taking a moment to pray a Psalm after each Lesson also helps keep your reading in a context of prayer, cutting down on the "study" mentality and enhancing the "worship" mentality. Again, this is not to say that studying the Bible is bad, but that such should not interrupt the course of worship. At most, make a highlight or note in your Bible or on a book mark so you can return to it when the prayer time is concluded.

Summary

Your Morning & Evening Offices are now looking like this:

1. Psalm(s) to pray
2. Old Testament Lesson (occasionally the first lesson is from the NT instead)
3. Psalm to pray
4. New Testament Lesson
5. Psalm to pray (maybe)
6. The Lord's Prayer

The length of time to do all this is probably about five minutes, maybe as many as ten if the readings are particularly long and you're reading them out loud. Same with the Psalms – *praying them means reading them aloud* – and sometimes they can be a little lengthy too.

Why is praying aloud important? Silent prayer is permissible when alone and there is one biblical example of it, but the overwhelming majority of prayers in the Bible are spoken, sung, or cried aloud. In liturgy – public worship – prayer that is readily understood is commanded by Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 14, hence also the Reformation principle of worship in the vernacular. But our concerns are mostly practical here: learning to pray the psalms needs to be out loud for several reasons. It helps you focus, it adds more senses to your experience and participation, it slows you down so you can think more – one has to walk before one can run!

Step Four: Add the Apostles' Creed

This is a small step, logistically speaking, but it's a milestone in your development of the discipline of the Daily Office. This is your first not-from-the-Bible ingredient in your prayer life, and this may be especially foreign or challenging for you depending upon your background.

As Anglicans we emphasize our adherence to creedal orthodoxy; that is, we look to the great Creeds (in our case three of them) to summarize the dogmas of the Christian faith – dogma being that which *must* be believed. When we include a Creed in a worship service, it is for multiple reasons.

1. It is a formation tool, helping us to internalize the basics of the faith.
2. It is a teaching tool, helping us to understand what we read in the Bible.
3. It is a particular form of prayer: a *confession of faith*.

Although none of the Psalms literally say “I believe ____”, there are many confessions of faith found within the psalms – proclaiming God's goodness, or mercy, or love. The reciting of a Creed is a development of that form of prayer, stating more explicitly a number of key points of doctrine regarding God, the person of Jesus, the Gospel, the Holy Spirit, and the Church.

Furthermore, we use the Apostles' Creed in the Daily Office not only because it's the shortest creed but because it was historically associated with the rite of holy baptism – this Creed (as best we can tell) was formed as the summary of the faith that was proclaimed in the Early Church when someone was getting baptized. So as we confess our faith with this creed in Morning and Evening Prayer we are essentially re-affirming our baptismal vows, recommitting ourselves to God and his Church and his Gospel.

It's a small thing to add, but it's a major addition to take in!

The Apostles' Creed can be found on page 20 of the Prayer Book, shortly before the Lord's Prayer in the liturgy. For now, you will be now praying the Creed immediately before the Lord's Prayer. Some wise logistics, as a result, should be that you make a point of saving one of appointed Psalms to follow the first Lesson and a second Psalm to follow the second Lesson, in order to separate the Bible-reading from the Creed-reciting. Not every morning and evening will provide enough

Psalms to accomplish this, so don't sweat it if you run out. This isn't the end of the road, after all, and the next step in this series will "solve" that problem anyway.

Summary

Your Morning & Evening Offices are now looking like this:

1. Psalm(s) to pray
2. Old Testament Lesson (occasionally the first lesson is from the NT instead)
3. Psalm to pray
4. New Testament Lesson
5. Psalm to pray (usually)
6. The Apostles' Creed (consider standing up for this!)
7. The Lord's Prayer

The length of time to do all this is still probably about five minutes, maybe as many as ten if the readings are particularly long and you're reading them out loud. Same with the Psalms – *praying them means reading them aloud* – and sometimes they can be a little lengthy too.

Step Five: Add Canticles

In terms of content and outline, you've already reached a distinctly historic Christian pattern of worship. This step adds in "Canticles", which are occasionally Psalms but usually Psalm-like texts from other parts of the Bible, to be read after each Scripture Lesson. This is where you really start entering into the liturgical history of the Church!

Functionally, this step does not introduce anything new; you started with learning to pray the psalms, and the Canticles work exactly the same way. Experientially this is purely a matter of logistics: all the Psalms Appointed for the morning or evening are prayed together, then you get the Lessons, both of which are followed by a Canticle.

In Morning Prayer, find your canticles starting on page 17 – you'll see two choices (*Te Deum laudamus* and *Benedictus es, Domine*) for the first one and the *Benedictus* for the second. In Evening Prayer, find your canticles starting on page 45 – the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc dimittis*. There are also Supplemental Canticles for Worship starting on page 79 and I do have a guide to choosing among them¹, but it's simplest to stick with the primary ones provided in the Morning and Evening Office liturgies and get used to them first. The supplemental canticles are just that – supplemental.

¹ <https://saint-aelfric-customary.org/2020/01/07/a-guide-to-choosing-the-supplemental-canticles/>

Summary

Your Morning & Evening Offices are now looking like this:

1. The Psalm(s) Appointed
2. Old Testament Lesson (occasionally the first lesson is from the NT instead)
3. First Canticle
4. New Testament Lesson
5. Second Canticle
6. The Apostles' Creed (consider standing up for this!)
7. The Lord's Prayer

This makes your recitation of the Daily Office about ten to fifteen minutes in length each morning and evening. You are now also engaging with four different places in the Prayer Book: the middle of the Morning Prayer liturgy, the middle of the Evening Prayer liturgy, the Psalter, and the Daily Office Lectionary.

Once you get used to this, you'll be well-positioned to fill out the rest of the Daily Office liturgies. Chances are that the next couple steps will progress quickly.

Step Six: Add the Confession

Alright, it's time for something distinctly Anglican: the prayer of confession at the daily office. While confessing our sins before God is a universal practice (if grossly underutilized among many Evangelicals and Pentecostals today), it is a distinctly Anglican practice to include it in the Daily Office. You will find it starting on page 11 for Morning Prayer and page 41 for Evening Prayer. There is a paragraph that the Officiant (the person leading the Office) reads aloud, followed by the prayer of confession itself, followed by a choice of three responses. Two of those responses are statements of absolution to be read by a priest or bishop, but the third is a prayer for forgiveness that is to be read by anyone when no such minister is present, and that is what you'll read when you're doing this alone.

You'll also see three "opening sentences of scripture" listed before this Confession set; feel free to read one of these first, too, as they serve as a sort of "call to worship", beginning to direct your focus upon God and his Word before the act of self-examination and confession.

In the Daily Office we confess our sins at the beginning of the liturgy. This teaches us:

1. that it is only in repentance that we find salvation;
2. that we can only approach God in humility, not pride or presumption;
3. that true worship comes from a "broken and contrite heart";
4. that there is no "health" (salvation) in us apart from God's grace.

So it's time to start your morning and evening prayer times with this confession. Sometimes you'll read it quickly and move right along. Sometimes you'll dwell on the words, or need to dwell on the words, along the way, letting their truth sink in and sober you up to reality. Sometimes a moment of silent self-examination will be necessary – think on your sins in the past day and release them to the Lord for forgiveness and healing. Sometimes this will feel merely a perfunctory feature of the Daily Office... remember this is a discipline, after all, so it's there to shape and form you. Your heart will not always be as "into it" as other times, just like how certain psalms may appeal to you less or more than others. The point is that this is the *pattern of worship* you are growing in to, and that you have this opportunity to repent every time you approach the Lord in prayer.

Summary

Your Morning & Evening Offices are now looking like this:

1. The Confession of Sin
2. The Psalm(s) Appointed
3. Old Testament Lesson (occasionally the first lesson is from the NT instead)
4. First Canticle
5. New Testament Lesson
6. Second Canticle
7. The Apostles' Creed (consider standing up for this!)
8. The Lord's Prayer

This makes your recitation of the Daily Office about fifteen minutes in length each morning and evening. Apart from the Canticles, the format and order of Morning and Evening Prayer are identical for you. But that will soon change.

Step Seven: Add some Prayers

Now it's time to develop your utilization of the Prayer Book. You're already reading the Confession, Psalms, Canticles, and Apostles' Creed from it, now it's time for some further prayers. In Morning Prayer pages 21-24 and in Evening Prayer pages 47-51 you will see that the Lord's Prayer is preceded and followed by a larger sequence of Prayers. The *Kyrie* ("Lord have mercy...") comes first, and after the Lord's Prayer comes a "Suffrage" (a back-and-forth set of versicles and responses, mostly taken from the Psalms), and after that a pile of "collects" and prayers.

A Collect is a specific form of prayer, and the Prayer Book has tons of them. The usual structure of a collect is:

1. an address to God (identifying a name or attribute or work of God)
2. a specific petition or request
3. a reason for that petition or request, often linking back to the address
4. an appeal to the name of Jesus

In the 2019 Prayer Book you'll the first Collect listed is "The Collect of the Day" – **feel free to skip that for now**; we'll add it in later. For now, we're focusing on developing your use of the Prayer Book liturgy without adding more page-flips.

Instead, finish your prayer times now with the Kyrie, Lord's Prayer, a set of Suffrages, the Collect for the Day of the Week, and a Prayer for Mission. Morning and Evening Prayer provide different lists of prayers for this section, so your experiences of morning and evening are going to start diverging at this point.

You'll notice that some of these prayers in Morning Prayer draw upon the image and reality of the beginning of the day, and Evening Prayer draws upon the images of darkness and light as pictures of death and life. Time and nature are explicitly now being drawn into your prayer life, and that's a beautiful thing!

You'll see that there are a couple more prayers and lines of other text after the prayers we've listed here, but don't worry about them for now. Historically, those have been optional, almost thought of in an after-the-liturgy kind of status, so we're going to save those for later. You're welcome to plough ahead and include them now if you like, but don't feel pressured.

Summary

Your Morning & Evening Offices are now looking like this:

1. The Confession of Sin
2. The Psalm(s) Appointed
3. Old Testament Lesson (occasionally the first lesson is from the NT instead)
4. First Cantic
5. New Testament Lesson
6. Second Cantic
7. The Apostles' Creed (consider standing up for this!)
8. The Prayers
 - a. Lord have mercy...
 - b. The Lord's Prayer
 - c. Suffrage
 - d. A Collect for (the day of the week)
 - e. A Prayer for Mission

At this point you're almost saying the entire morning and evening offices in the prayer book tradition, congratulations!

Step Eight: Add the Invitatory

After the Confession of Sin you've probably noticed a little dialogue: "*O Lord, open our lips / and our mouth shall proclaim your praise*" and so on. This is called the Invitatory – a fancy description of something that *invites* us to worship. Included in it is the *Gloria Patri* – "Glory be to the Father..." – which you will find is also said at the end of most of the Canticles. If you haven't already noticed and implemented it, now's also the time to add this *Gloria Patri* to the end of the regular Psalms Appointed, too.

The lines "O Lord open our lips..." are from a Psalm, but their liturgical use in the Offices dates to monastic tradition; the idea was that this dialogue was the beginning of the first morning office, effectively being the first thing the monk says each day. Although this is not the case for us, nor is it even the beginning of the liturgy, it is *like* the beginning of the liturgy. If you conceive of the Confession as preparatory to praising God, then the Invitatory dialogue is where our praises actually do begin.

After this dialogue, Morning and Evening Prayer diverge from one another.

Morning Prayer sees an "invitatory psalm" take place, which is traditionally Psalm 95 (*Venite*), though when that psalm shows up as one of the daily psalms appointed our tradition is to replace it with Psalm 100 (*Jubilate*). On Easter the *Pascha nostrum* takes their place. You'll also see a set of Antiphons, which are brief phrases (often based on bible verses) to be said before and after the invitatory psalm. Catholic tradition is *full* of antiphons, but our prayer book only provides them for this one place in the liturgy. Even here, it's optional, so don't worry about them if you find it too much. They're there to beautify and enrich the liturgy, so if they're a burden, don't worry!

Evening Prayer is simpler: we find the *Phos hilaron*, an ancient Christian hymn, to be read between the dialogue and the Psalms. It explores the image of Christ as our Light, which has earned it a beloved place in the liturgical tradition. The classical prayer books didn't have anything here for Evening Prayer, so the *Phos hilaron* remains optional. Or you can read or sing a different hymn instead, if you prefer.

Summary

Your Morning & Evening Offices are now looking like this:

1. (Opening Sentence)
2. The Confession of Sin
3. The Invitatory
4. Invitatory Psalm *or* Phos Hilaron
5. The Psalm(s) Appointed
6. Old Testament Lesson (occasionally the first lesson is from the NT instead)
7. First Canticle
8. New Testament Lesson
9. Second Canticle
10. The Apostles' Creed (consider standing up for this!)
11. The Prayers
 - a. Lord have mercy...

- b. The Lord's Prayer
- c. Suffrage
- d. A Collect for (the day of the week)
- e. A Prayer for Mission

This covers almost the entire Prayer Book liturgy for daily Morning and Evening Prayer. Two more steps remain to complete it, and then two extra steps to expand it further if you are so inclined.

Step Nine: Add the Collect of the Day

You'll be aware that, in the Prayers, we've been skipping the Collect of the Day. Now it's time to add that in. Under where it says "The Collect of the Day" it notes that you can find them in "The Collects of the Christian Year" section of the Prayer Book. In the rubrics above (in *italics*) you'll see it names pages 598-640 for that section.

Functionally, this is a very simple addition: look up the Collect of the Day that applies, and pray it at this point in the service. Most of the time, the Collect of the Day is the same all week, based upon the most recent Sunday. But there are also holy days that come with their own Collect of the Day. The Prayer Book's calendar also directs that the Collects for Sundays and Holy Days are normally to be used starting at Evening Prayer *before* the day in question begins. The experiential challenge here is that you need to understand the basics of the Church Calendar in order to find the correct Collect of the Day. Presumably, you've been going to an Anglican church for a while, if you've put this much effort into learning to pray the Anglican Daily Office, so that experience should be enough to give you a sense of where you are in the year. You'll hear the Collect of the Day for each Sunday at the communion service, right before the readings, so that'll tell you if you grabbed the right one the evening before and earlier that morning, and it'll set you straight for the rest of the week (again, except for other holy days that might come up).

It may be helpful to buy a special calendar, or use your prayer book to mark one up yourself ahead of time, so you can easily see what the Collect of the Day every day. This can be a fun activity to do with kids, too, inviting them to color each day's box the traditional liturgical color... my four-year-old loves it!

The main point of this piece of the Daily Office is to provide a tie-in to the liturgical rounds of prayer that are more fully emphasized in the Service of Holy Communion. For the most part, the Daily Office is meant to be a stable liturgy, changing little from day to day and season to season, the Collect being one of its only links to the ebb and flow of our liturgical year. And so, learning to identify the Collect of the Day is a milestone in your education of the liturgy, connecting your regular daily prayers to the life of the greater Church beyond your home.

That being said, don't worry overmuch about this. Most of the time, the Collect of the Day is just an extra bookmark in your Prayer Book where it simply moves from Sunday to Sunday. If you miss a holy day or grab the wrong week from time to time, you'll survive. Liturgy is meant to be formative, not stressful. Checking in at church each Sunday will usually provide you with everything you "need to know" about this piece of it.

Summary

Your Morning & Evening Offices are now looking like this:

1. (Opening Sentence)
2. The Confession of Sin
3. The Invitatory
4. Invitatory Psalm *or* Phos Hilaron
5. The Psalm(s) Appointed
6. Old Testament Lesson (occasionally the first lesson is from the NT instead)
7. First Cantic
8. New Testament Lesson
9. Second Cantic
10. The Apostles' Creed (consider standing up for this!)
11. The Prayers
 - a. Lord have mercy...
 - b. The Lord's Prayer
 - c. Suffrage
 - d. The Collect of the Day
 - e. A Collect for (the day of the week)
 - f. A Prayer for Mission

This covers almost the entire Prayer Book liturgy for daily Morning and Evening Prayer. One more step remain to complete it, and then two extra steps to expand it further if you are so inclined.

Step Ten: Add the Closing Prayers

The last thing to add to the Daily Office are the closing prayers at the end of the service. These are the same in both morning and evening: a General Thanksgiving, a Prayer of St. John Chrysostom, a quick dialogue, and a final "grace" or "blessing" (on pages 25-26 and 51-53).

Historically, most of these have been optional prayers to tack onto the end of the Daily Office, and most of them remain optional even in our new Prayer Book. And indeed it may make more sense to omit the Prayer of St. John Chrysostom when you're praying the Office alone, since it makes reference to the gathering of people in prayer. Nevertheless, be sure to read it from time to time anyway, because even though you may be praying alone in the physical sense, you are indeed praying in spiritual unity with untold thousands of fellow Anglicans.

If you're so inclined, the first of the three closing sentences (sometimes called "graces" or "blessings") is an excellent opportunity to make the sign of the cross, at the three-fold name of God: Father (up), Son (down), and Holy Spirit (left, right).

Summary

You are now praying the entire Daily Office, by the book, without omission. If you're doing this comfortably, you can (and probably should!) invite others to join you. Include your family, or invite some other church members to join in with you! Maybe even talk to your priest about doing this in the church itself. Historically, every parish church was supposed to provide the daily rounds of prayer in full, after all. Wouldn't that be amazing if God's people once again could be so moved to daily corporate prayer?

Step Eleven: Supplement it with Occasional Prayers

Well, you're a regular at the Daily Office, now, that's awesome. You want to pray more? Even more awesome!

After reading the three Collects and Prayers, and before the closing sequence of prayers, there is a line where further prayers are invited. You could add your own prayers, on the spot, if you so choose. Perhaps you've already been doing that. But you could also be drawing upon a larger collection of Occasional Prayers and Thanksgivings, that start on page 641. There are 125 prayers in that list, which is a lot to take in. Most of the classical prayer books provided a smaller list of extra prayers, tacked onto the end of Morning Prayer, but the list has grown so large that it's been moved to a sort of appendix location where you can draw upon it regardless to the particular Office you may be saying at the time.

If you want to go about using the Occasional Prayers in an orderly manner, feel free to use the outline provided in a previous article².

² <https://saint-aelfric-customary.org/2019/08/09/regular-occasional-prayers/>

Step Twelve: Supplement it with Hymnody

After reading the three Collects and Prayers, and before the closing sequence of prayers, there is a line where further prayers are invited. It also notes that an anthem may be sung. This is where you can begin to transform “the Daily Office” into “the Choral Service”, or Evening Prayer to “Evensong”!

Any Anglican Hymnal worth its salt has a section for Morning Hymns and a section for Evening Hymns, and those are the perfect places to start when it comes to adding music to the Daily Office. Like the Collects for each day of the week, these hymns pay particular attention to the time of day, drawing beautiful connections between “natural time” and “sacred time”. You may also find the hymns for each season of the church calendar to be nice points of connection between your recitation of the Office and the celebration of Holy Communion on Sundays. If you want to think big, and look at how to sing the whole hymnal in a year, I’ve got you covered!³

The simplest places to add hymnody to the Daily Office are three: the aforementioned Anthem towards the end of both Morning and Evening Prayer, and the *Phos hilaron*, which can be substituted for any hymn. After that you could consider where to insert additional hymns – perhaps at the very beginning or end. Technically even the Canticles can be substituted out for hymns, but that would be less desirable from a traditional standpoint.

Good Anglican hymnals also usually include a setting or two of “The Choral Service”, which sets some of the prayers of the Daily Office to chant. If you are so inclined, you could pick up a hymnal or similar book, and do that too.

With music and additional prayers, the Daily Office can take up to half an hour. This can be difficult to sustain in this busy world, but I love it when I have the time and discipline to make that happen! Just remember that supplements are *supplements*, not requirements. You may not always be able to make use of every option to expand the Daily Office, and sometimes will have to make use of the rubrics to reduce and truncate them instead. The goal, as I’ve said throughout this series, is *consistency*. Not every day will see you feeling or acting up to snuff, and that’s alright. The point is that you have a stable life of prayer and worship such that, when things go awry for a little while, you’re not thrown completely off the spiritual track. Along those lines, the Daily Office is unbeatable. Godspeed!

³ <https://saint-aelfric-customary.org/2019/07/15/sing-the-hymnal-in-a-year/>