

Three Traditional Forms of Catholic Prayer

Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours (also called *The Divine Office*) is the official daily prayer of the church. It consists of selected prayers and psalms, readings from Scripture and readings from the Church Fathers or other spiritual writers. The early Christian community adopted this style of prayer from the Jewish custom of praying at designated times each day, and the pattern formed a model for early monastic communities, where the monks gathered for prayer six times each day.

Today the "Hours" are prayed in common in communities of monks and nuns. Most priests, deacons and men and women who have made vows in a religious community pray the Divine Office or a version of the Liturgy of the Hours privately two or three times a day. In recent years many lay (non-ordained) men and women have also begun praying a version of the Hours privately.

Various versions of the Liturgy of the Hours are available in printed form; the most common for lay persons are *Christian Prayer*, *Shorter Christian Prayer*, and *An Everyday Book of the Hours*. Monthly prayer journals such as *Give Us This Day* and *Magnificat* also follow the Hours format.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is the Latin name for *Holy Reading*. It consists of a slow and reflective reading from (or listening to) Holy Scripture. This way of praying also originated in the early monasteries as a way of learning and praying for those who could not read. It was often considered the first step toward meditation or contemplation.

In the process of Holy Reading, the reading is usually repeated several times. During the first time one listens for a word or phrase which stands out to the listener. After the second time the listener contemplates what the meaning of the message is for him or herself. After the third time the listener tries to discern how he or she should respond to the reading.

Holy Reading is a method of reflection and prayer which can be done in a group or privately by an individual.

Daily Examen

The Daily Examen is a prayerful reflection on the events of the day which helps us recognize God's presence and discern God's desire for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church which became a popular way of praying, especially for individuals in religious life and more recently for lay people as well.

The Examen was popularized by St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits.

The formal Examen includes five steps, and takes about 15 minutes to complete. Although there are many variations of the Examen, the traditional one recommended by Ignatius included these steps:

1. Take time to become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the events of the day with gratitude.
3. Pay special attention to your emotions—eg, feelings of satisfaction, gratitude, disappointment, regret.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it; reflect on what happen and how you responded to it.
5. Look toward tomorrow, anticipating how one might be more open to God's grace and love.

In popular Catholic piety, the Daily Examen often takes the form of a daily *Examination of Conscience* or *Examination of Consciousness*. In the past, this examination often consisted of reviewing violations of the Ten Commandments; in more recent time the criteria for examining the day has been expanded to include the Great Commandment, the Beatitudes, or the Last Judgment.