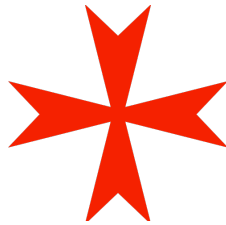


# Militia Templi – Order of the Poor Knights of Christ



## THE DIVINE OFFICE

*Document for internal use by members of the Militia for further reflection  
on the value and characteristics of the Church's hourly prayer*



*editio Præceptorïæ Americæ Septentrionalis*

MMXXIV

# Introduction

As wisely stated by the Motu proprio *Rubricarum instructum* (July 25, 1960) of His Holiness Pope Saint John XXIII, with which the new rubrics of the Breviary and the Roman Missal were approved, the Apostolic See, especially after the Council of Trent, has always taken care to define in the most precise way and to order in the most complete way the code of rubrics that regulate the public worship of the Church. Over time, many corrections, modifications, and additions have been introduced, greatly increasing the entire system of rubrics, not always respecting a true logical order, and not without harming the original clarity and simplicity.

Therefore, it is particularly useful to provide members of the Militia with some points of reflection on the meaning, importance, and richness of the recitation of the Divine Office so that the practice of hourly prayer increasingly becomes a real instrument of daily prayer and growth in faith.

To this end, it is appropriate to start with the two chapters of the Rule of the Militia of the Temple dedicated precisely to the Divine Office: Chapter V and Chapter XV. In Chapter Five (“Of the Divine Office”) we read:

“The Knights, and those who with them – for the salvation of their souls – serve under the banners of Our Lord Jesus Christ and Our Lady in the Militia of the Temple, daily direct their supplications to God, Lord of all things, in all humility and sincere devotion. The Knights recite the Office according to the usages of the Roman Church, possibly all the Day Hours, but, if this is not possible, at least resolve to always recite Lauds or Vespers [...].

The spiritual man, who draws from the splendors of faith, finds in prayer the first good, the first duty. This esteem grows even more regarding liturgical prayer, which, being the official prayer of the Church, is undoubtedly the most effective, the most pleasing to God, and has a greater impact on the human heart than all private prayers. Having chosen the bosom of the Church his Bride for his dwelling, Jesus himself prays in her and for her. And it is especially through the liturgy that Jesus manifests himself to souls, enlightens and strengthens them, nourishes and transforms them, working in them the mysteries of his sorrowful and glorious life as the liturgical cycle offers these mysteries to our contemplation. To live the liturgical life, according to the order established by the Church, is to live the very life of Jesus. And in particular, for what concerns the members of the Militia, the easiest and quickest way to achieve the perfection of their state is to live the liturgical life more intensely, making sure that the Holy Mass and the Divine Office are the foundation and basis of their sanctification.

# 1 Obstacles to Fervent Prayer

After the sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacraments, nothing is more beautiful, greater, or more sanctifying in the Church than the canonical prayer; therefore, nothing should stimulate greater interest and fervor. But beware: to recite the Office without devotion, distracted by temporal concerns or feverishly agitated life, interrupting it for trivial reasons, or performing it hastily, means to truly neglect the principal duty of religious life. The recitation of the Office is a holy work that greatly honors God, enchants the angels, and plays a primary role in our personal sanctification, as well as in that of the Christian people.

The difficulties that oppose the fervent recitation of the Office lead to the fatal consequence of no longer having the necessary freedom of mind to pray with tranquility: the disorder, for example, introduced into the heart by original sin and aggravated by personal sins, makes man estranged from the things of faith, dull and apathetic regarding eternal goods, subject to the allure of earthly things that dazzle with their noise and glitter and take possession of the senses and faculties. The canonical prayer, however, being the highest expression of a soul free from human thoughts and longing only for heaven, if reduced to a mere movement of the lips and not springing from the depths of the heart, produces no benefit. We will hold the tasty fruit of the holy liturgy between our lips, but we will not taste the delights that nourish the supernatural life;

*Tu calcabis olivam et non ungeris oleo; et mustum, et non bibes vinum.*

You will tread the olive, but you will not anoint yourself with oil; you will tread the must, but you will not drink the wine. (Micah 6:15)

Shake off spiritual lethargy, therefore, so that we may profit from this effective means of sanctification, not overly burdening ourselves with exterior activities; no work is fruitful in the spiritual field if it is not willed by God, if it does not begin, continue, and end with the help of that grace obtained through prayer that elevates us to God, unites us to Him as the source of holiness and greatness, enabling us to partake in the ineffable praises that the Three Divine Persons have rendered to each other *ab aeterno*.

## 2 Excellence of the Divine Office

We are fragile creatures; therefore, we need to continually knock at the door of Divine Mercy, asking for the graces necessary to persevere in goodness. Consequently, our first obligation is to recognize the Creator, to present Him with the tribute of adoration, praise, and our dependence. But how to do it worthily? It is God who teaches us the art of praying well by inspiring a prayer of praise – precisely the Divine Office – which springs spontaneously from the human heart as a full acknowledgment of His glory, not only for the wonders He has performed but also for His beauty and greatness.

As soon as a soul enters into dialogue with God, the action of the Holy Spirit envelops, enlightens, strengthens, and rejoices it with His anointing; it adorns itself with the flowers of good desires and enriches itself with the fruits of holy works. If it forgets God, it is deprived of the efficacy of grace and falls back under the tyranny of human feelings. Let us not be deceived: without an interior life, we may labor, but we will achieve little, and this little will still be tainted by the earthly motives that inspired it.

*Vere novit recte vivere, qui recte novit orare,*

He truly knows how to live well who knows how to pray well,

says St. Augustine; and St. John Chrysostom:

*Sicut corpus sine anima non potest vivere, sic anima sine oratione mortua est et graviter olens.*

As the body cannot live without the soul, so the soul without prayer is dead and heavily stinking.

Only prayer, therefore, can ensure that we remain faithful to all our obligations because only it obtains those divine aids without which we are reduced to the most absolute incapacity to progress in the supernatural order; thus, in the end, our value in the eyes of God is proportional to our spirit of prayer. If this is true for every Christian soul, it is especially true for souls consecrated to God by solemn Profession. God has chosen these souls to attend more freely to the things of heaven.

And how could God not favor the praises He himself places on our lips? How could He not listen to those prayers He Himself has dictated to be fulfilled? What comfort when, opening the Breviary, we can say: "I have the absolute certainty that God is truly pleased with the supplications I am about to address to Him, and the sentiments I express exalt His Majesty, while the favors I solicit are precisely those He most vividly desires to grant me!"

The liturgical prayer, therefore, disposes willing souls to the holy effusions of grace, exalting the noblest and most intimate feelings of the heart, safeguarding from the insidious incursions of the devil and dangerous passions, ensuring special, mysterious protection in all dangers of body and soul, surrounding the chosen ones with the joys that are the prelude to the happiness of angels in adoration before the Holy Trinity.

### **3 The Social Work Par Excellence**

If the distracted and superficial recitation of the Office caused harm only to us, it would already be a considerable evil. But the gravest injury is done to the Church, where, being a perfectly organized society, members are in solidarity with each other, responsible for each other, and therefore subject to social duties superior to purely individual obligations, because the general good prevails over the particular good. Among these duties, liturgical prayer holds the first place, being an eminently social work, the most fruitful; without it, other works remain sterile because it is prayer that guides zeal, suggests the choice of means willed by God, confers His grace, and finally disposes souls to receive the holy word and action.

Therefore, if the spiritual advancement of each individual member depends primarily on the fervor of their prayers, the spiritual progress and prosperity of the Church are fundamentally linked to the Holy Sacrifice and the fervent recitation of the Breviary, whose recitation thus assumes a public and social function, ensuring the perpetuity of the prayer of the Christian people. For this reason, St. Thomas has defined the Office:

*Communis quidem oratio, quae per ministros Ecclesiae in persona totius fidelis populi Deo offertur.*

Indeed, a common prayer, which is offered to God by the ministers of the Church in the person of the entire faithful people.

We understand, therefore, the error of those who consider the time dedicated to the Divine Office wasted, believing it would be more fruitfully spent in exterior works. The presumption of being able to

do without God's grace only leads to a disordered and inconclusive agitation, inspired by human motives, following the whims of impressions, suffocating the interior life, and eventually causing fatigue, apathy, and disgust for true work.

## 4 Two Timely Suggestions

For the recitation of the Divine Office, two suggestions are timely.

First. It is very useful to add to the universal and general liturgical intentions of the Church those that are particular and personal to us, arising from our own needs and the special devotion of the moment. For example: the Hour of Prime, in the thought of the Church, is a morning prayer; why not recite it as our morning prayer, inserting the thought of sanctifying our day by referring the inspired words to the needs and difficulties we will encounter during the day?

Furthermore, when we recite the Psalms, let us appreciate their sublimity, knowing them to be truly inspired, composed by the direct motion and impulse of the Holy Spirit, "for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pt 1:21). In whatever interior state we find ourselves, whatever the need of the moment and the difficulty of the hour, the words of the psalms will always be suitable to the disposition of our soul, adapting to the taste and pleasure of each, providing an admirable and invigorating nourishment for the mind and heart. If the psalm has a special sense in the Office, interpret it with that sense; if it is chosen without a specific liturgical intention, limit ourselves to referring to ourselves the sentiments it expresses, according to our needs and aspirations, identifying ourselves as much as possible with the feelings they express:

*Si orat psalmus, orate; et si gemit, gemite; et si gratulatur, gaudete; et si sperat, sperate et si timet, timete; omnia enim quae hic conscripta sunt, speculum nostrum sunt.*

If the psalm prays, pray; if it groans, groan; if it rejoices, rejoice; if it hopes, hope; and if it fears, fear. For all the things that are written here are our mirror (Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps 30, sermo III*).

Verse by verse, our soul is lifted towards God in transports of adoration and love, only to descend into the depths of self-knowledge and sincere humility that arise from authentic introspection. For example, if we recite a psalm that sings of deliverance from the slavery of Egypt and the passage through the Red Sea, we do not stop at the literal sense but see in it the symbol of the redemption of souls wrought by Jesus Christ and interpret this psalm as a song of thanksgiving for our redemption, for the immense benefit of received baptism, so that this prayer will have an incomparably superior attraction. When we recite the Office of a Virgin, offer it to the Lord to obtain, through the intercession of the Saint, perfect purity of the senses and heart, or a more ardent love for Jesus, the Divine Spouse of our souls. And again, reciting the Office of a Martyr, ask for resignation in the special tribulation that afflicts us, etc. Referring the canonical text to our spiritual needs is an excellent aid to avoid distraction.

Another suggestion. If the soul is stunned by the tumult of many tasks during the day, the dispositions required to enter into the spirit of the different canonical Hours are, if not absent, at least dormant; it will therefore be necessary to awaken them if we want the prayer to come from the heart and not only from the lips, that is, to be conscious and effective prayer. Therefore, appropriate preparation may occur as follows:

1. Before opening the Breviary, gather ourselves for a moment; decisively put aside any extraneous concerns, deferring even proper thoughts until after the canonical recitation. Then place ourselves in the presence of God and unite with the angels to praise the Lord.

2. Take a careful look at the mystery being celebrated and its fruits, align our sentiments with the spirit of the Office or canonical Hour we are about to recite, reflect on the special graces we wish to obtain, and stir in ourselves a strong desire to obtain them.

3. Implore divine assistance, unite with Jesus, invoke Mary's help by fervently reciting the prayers: *Aperi Domine; Domine in unione; Pater et Ave; Deus in adiutorium*; and with the *Gloria Patri*, sincerely form our good intention.

Recite the Office without haste, taking the necessary time. Be persuaded that in every liturgical formula, God has placed a grace of light and strength for us, and put into practice St. Bonaventure's advice: "As much as possible, do not pronounce a word distractedly and without understanding it."

## 5 Respecting the Commitment Taken

The celebration of the Divine Office has two fundamental components: the "liturgical" component, as the Divine Office has for its object the continuity of the prayer of Christ and the Church and for its purpose the sanctification of time, is regulated by its own rules prescribed in the appropriate liturgical books and demands an *ars celebrandi*; the "juridical" component, not only in relation to respecting the liturgical norms that regulate the Divine Office but also in reference to the fact that it is a public worship offered to God by the members of the Militia, who are obliged to perform it daily *pro homines et pro hominibus*.

Therefore, as the Rule states, the Church – to ensure the perpetuation of prayer within it – appoints the members of the Militia to faithfully and daily perform the public worship in the form it establishes. Consequently, with the obligations assumed in the solemn Profession, they have a duty towards the Church, the entire faithful people, and their Grand Master. It is a duty concerning the integrity, daily practice, timing, and *modus celebrandi*, as well as a genuine need dictated by experiencing the need for God, witnessing that human nature inherently holds the solemn truth that we were made by God for no other end than to know Him, love Him, and be happy with this blessed knowledge, now and in the life that awaits us in the hereafter.

Since, in fact, human nature is not entirely spiritual but a combination of soul and body, it is necessary for man to pay homage to his Creator not only in the secret chamber of his heart but also with outward and bodily manifestations of veneration and love. Thus, public and communal worship of the Divine Majesty is a strict duty. St. Thomas Aquinas thus defines the reason we must render internal and external worship to God:

"We pay reverence and honor to God not for Himself, who in Himself is so full of glory that no creature can add anything to Him, but for us: because through the reverence and honor we pay to God, our mind submits to Him, thus reaching its own perfection. Now the human soul needs to be guided by sensible things to unite with God, because, as the Apostle says, "His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20). Therefore, in divine worship, it is necessary to use material things as signs through which the human soul is stirred to spiritual actions that unite it with God. Religion thus embraces internal acts, which are primary and essential to religion, and external acts, which are secondary and ordered to the internal ones" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.81, a.7).

What the Rule prescribes regarding the recitation of the Divine Office does not oblige in the case of urgent grave and real necessity, understood as that presupposition or circumstance justifying an action different or contrary to a juridical disposition having special binding force.

However, it is hoped that no member of the Militia uses empty legalism to evade such an important duty, easily finding in every excuse a reason to self-justify the omission of the daily recitation of the Divine Office. Laziness and spiritual lethargy do not excuse this obligation and indeed constitute a true disregard for the commitment of faith assumed. This is the criterion with which each member of the Militia must examine their conscience regarding their duty to pray *cotidie, fideliter et integraliter* the Divine Office, aware that the liturgical worship of the Church entrusted to them according to the Rule is their first and principal duty, as well as the greatest and most urgent act of pastoral charity to be performed in favor of the people of God. Neglecting it for trivialities, inappropriate diversions, or in any case secondary to such a great mission received, or reaching the end of the day having found time for many things and many people but not for the Lord, must cause much reflection: if one does not stay with God in prayer, not only does one greatly miss their principal task, but also probably what one does is not done well.

The recitation of the Divine Office, therefore, pertains to the monastic character of the Militia.

Far from us, therefore, any kind of sloppiness or undue haste, vain worries, and foolish imaginations. The practice of the Office constitutes an anticipation on earth of what will be our eternal occupation in heaven. As read in the preface of Pope Urban VIII to the Breviary:

*Divina psalmodia est eius hymnodiae filia quae canitur assidue ante sedem Dei et Agni.*

The divine psalmody is the daughter of His hymnody, which is sung continually before the throne of God and the Lamb.

## 6 Excusing Causes from the Obligation of the Office

Regarding the obligatoriness of the Office, it is appropriate to mention the causes excusing from such an obligation since the two things are closely connected.

- If a physical obstacle (e.g., lack of the Breviary or a serious illness) or a moral obstacle (e.g., a grave occupation, sometimes assumed by one's duty or charity) prevents the recitation of the Office, one who cannot (objectively) recite the entire Office but can recite a considerable part such as a minor Hour, is obliged to recite that part. If one cannot even recite this, then, as provided in Chapter V of the Rule, "When a Knight is prevented from reciting the Office, he says a *Pater noster*, ten *Ave Marias*, and a *Requiem aeternam*."
- Furthermore, in the case of legitimate dispensation, it can suspend or even completely remove the obligation of the Office, which, as already mentioned, is of precept. However, in urgent cases, the Grand Master can, for a just cause, temporarily dispense the members of the Militia.

Therefore, to fully satisfy the precept prescribed by the Rule, the Divine Office must be recited in due order, place, posture, and time; integrally; continuously; vocally; with attention and intention.

## 7 Studying the Office

In the variety of alternating different Offices, each of them develops a different theme, evokes various considerations, awakens always new feelings, and requires the soul to have ever different dispositions, while the whole of the Offices considers all the conditions and moral situations in which a Christian and particularly each member of the Militia may find themselves. For this reason, studying the Office is therefore indispensable to us. But let us be clear: studying it out of curiosity or just to acquire new liturgical and exegetical knowledge would be of very little profit. Only love possesses the cipher of Sacred Scripture, and it reveals its treasures to those who study it with faith, humility, and simplicity to please God and better fulfill the canonical duty. What is the object of this study? The rubrics, first of all. The practice of the Breviary makes the solution of most cases easy for us.

## 8 Respecting Timeliness

Therefore, it is necessary to know how to carve out not only appropriate spaces and places to withdraw, like Jesus, on the mountain to pray to the Father but also appropriate times because the observance of timeliness is linked to the spiritual fruit. Indeed, if prayer, even when made with the minimum of good dispositions, remains prayer, in the Divine Office said out of time, that rhythm created by the Church to insert the whole day and all activities into a special climate of prayer, of praise to God, of union with Him, is lacking. Timely fidelity requires and imposes a certain personal discipline, self-control and order of various occupations dictated by higher motives. In short, diligence in this field has, among its many advantages, that of a “spiritual pedagogy” in managing and administering one’s time so that in the morning one praises and in the evening one retires in the prayer of verifying the day, asking for forgiveness, thanksgiving, and praise to the Lord of time and history.

Unequivocal characters linked to timeliness are found in the textual content of the prayer itself, so that the dissociation between astronomical time and liturgical time would invalidate the *veritas horarum* and nullify the sacramental meaning, giving a false sound to what is being recited.

Therefore, there would be no sense or benefit in a prayer like the Divine Office if the relationship between the text used for the recitation of individual Hours and the precise moment celebrated did not favor concentrating all life in that moment of prayer, setting aside every habitual occupation to dedicate oneself exclusively to praising God.

## 9 The Sanctification of Time

The recitation of the Divine Office consists, therefore, of experiencing time which, in a Judeo-Christian vision of history, has a linear trend in which everything evolves towards the future, compared to the classical Greek conception in which everything repeats cyclically.<sup>1</sup> A relative dimension, that of time, in continuous becoming towards what is immutable and eternal, within which the time of man unfolds,

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. R. Vinco, *Che cos'è il tempo? Spunti per una riflessione storico-filosofica*, in “Esperienza e Teologia” 10-11 (2000), pp. 69-78.



progressively decreasing through the succession of days, months, years, in the perspective of the fulfillment of a divine plan to which man is called to contribute.<sup>2</sup>

By interrupting the rhythm of the day at fixed intervals, time is rediscovered and lived as an occasion of grace and salvation, as it is visited by the eternal presence of God who exercises total dominion over it. This constitutes a connection between heaven and earth, the union of earthly praise with that of the blessed,<sup>3</sup> an anticipation of the eternal praise beyond the parousia in the new Jerusalem, the eternal joy of the heavenly assembly. A participation, therefore, in that uninterrupted adoration, that universal praise which in heaven the four living beings, the twenty-four elders, and the entire crowd of the saved,<sup>4</sup> together with the angels, perform prostrating before the throne and the Lamb, fulfilling the ultimate purpose of creation: the glory of God.

Time, with its natural rhythms characterized by the alternation of day and night and the succession of seasons, is the element in which the entire life of the members of the Militia unfolds, for whom time is marked by Christian festivals that make each day different from the others: Sunday and weekdays, the great feasts of Easter, Pentecost, Christmas with their respective preparatory periods, the feasts of the Lord, the Madonna, and the Saints.

The hourly division also corresponds to the internal biorhythm proper to each person, according to which there are hours when one is more awake and ready and others when one is less so. Submitting to a rhythm different from that corresponding to one's nature is negative; therefore, living time well means conforming one's biorhythm to the fundamental rhythm of the universe, living time not as an element to depend on frantically, but as a reality in which to grasp and fully live the meaning of life.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the concept of temporality in the Divine Office is fully expressed not only by limiting it to the hours of the day but also relating it to weeks, months, seasons, and the year through the rich eucharistical content of all its components: hymns, prayers, petitions, antiphons, verses, etc.

Thus, the praise raised to God in the morning, at the renewal of the mystery of light, and the thanksgiving rendered to Him in the evening for the benefit of light and other gifts of creation and redemption, ensure that "Morning Lauds" (a memorial of the resurrection of Christ, who is the sun of salvation for the whole world) and "Evening Vespers" (a commemorative celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Last Supper and the Cross), constitute the cardinal elements of the "hourly liturgy," preceded and followed by the minor Hours.

Leaving aside the Night Office constituted by Matins, to be recited around midnight, let us dwell on the Day Hours contained in the Diurnal, and articulated in the following order:

- Lauds at dawn, *ad galli cantum*
- Prime after sunrise
- Terce at 9:00 am
- Sext at noon
- None at 3:00 pm

---

<sup>2</sup>Cf. V. Cottini, "C'è un tempo per ogni cosa" (Qo 3,17). *Significato del tempo nella sapienza ebraica biblica*, in "Esperienza e Teologia", 10-11 (2000), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. LG 50

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Apoc 4,8-11; 5,8-14; 7,9-12.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. A. Grün, *Nella dimensione del tempo dei monaci*, Queriniana, Brescia 20072, pp. 39-40.

- Vespers at sunset
- Compline at nightfall.

**Lauds.** Dawn appears, revealing to our astonished eyes the splendors of creation; at this sight, the heart erupts into a hymn of praise to God, the beginning and end of creation, and into a song of gratitude to the Incarnate Word, who, with His sacrifice, has restored everything in Himself. The character of this Hour is defined in the ferial Hymns, which remind us that dawn is an image of Christ, the true light of the world (Monday and Wednesday), and a symbol of the purity of Christian life (Thursday); they tell us that we must renounce the works of darkness to follow Christ and behave as true children of light. *Nox praecessit, dies autem appropinquavit. Abjiciamus ergo opera tenebrarum...* Before starting this Hour, let us gather for a moment, thinking of the happiness of being admitted among the heavenly choirs to sing divine praises together.

**Prime.** At six, the Christian's day begins with the Hour of Prime, morning prayer. It is the hour when Jesus offered Himself to the Father in the praetorium on the morning of the crucifixion, accepting for our sake the painful ascent to Calvary. Let us unite with Him to traverse the stage of our Calvary assigned to the new day. The Church, with the Hymn *Iam lucis orto sidere*, sets before us the work of sanctification that will overshadow us until evening: fleeing from sin, guarding the tongue and eyes, purity of heart, mortification of the senses, and the practice of the heart, so that, come evening, we may rejoice for having glorified God with our holy conduct. This idea of morning prayer is manifested in Psalm 53 *Deus in nomine tuo*, contained in the Chapter *Regi saeculorum*, renewing the good intention for all the day's actions, in the Responsory *Christe, Fili Dei vivi*, and especially in the Prayer *Domine Deus omnipotens*, asking for divine protection against sin and the grace to think, speak, and act according to God's justice and will. Before beginning, let us briefly reflect on our duty to live the new day granted by the Lord in holiness, taking a quick look at our daily duties, the sufferings and difficulties we will encounter in fulfilling God's will, especially those difficulties in which we most often fail.

**Terce.** It is nine o'clock. The sun, following its course, warms the earth with its beneficial heat, a symbol of the charity that the Holy Spirit ignites in souls. It is the hour when the divine Spirit descended on the Apostles gathered in the Cenacle to inflame them with His ardors, the hour that, in the conventual rite, immediately precedes the celebration of the Holy Mass in which the priest prepares to ascend the altar to offer himself in holocaust to the Eternal Father in union with Jesus' holocaust. And what better disposition could we have for such an august function than a heart burning with love for Jesus in the Eucharist? Is not love the fire that must consume all earthly affections in us? Therefore, at Terce, the Church has us implore the Holy Spirit for such perfect charity that, becoming the special object of this canonical Hour, it takes possession of our entire being and radiates around us, especially in our relations with our neighbor. This is reminded at the beginning of the Hour by the Hymn *Nunc sancte nobis Spiritus* and by the Chapter of Sunday: *Deus caritas est et qui manet in caritate...* The Chapter of the weekdays *Sana me Domine* with the verse insists on the sentiment of our fragility, which agrees with that of charity. Let us take care to recite this Office with intense fervor and a strong desire to love God with all our heart.

**Sext.** The sun is at its zenith, and the midday heat, which exhausts and weakens, is an image of the oppression of the soul under the weight of suffering, the malignity of our neighbor, and the temptations of the devil. The latter, taking advantage of physical fatigue, tries to drag us into acts of impatience, discourages us, pushes us to lack charity with our neighbor, and to other faults that excessive heat can favor. Therefore, the Church, solicitous for our physical and moral health, with the Hymn *Rector potens* prays the Almighty Lord to extinguish the flames of discord and the fire of passions, to give health to the body

and peace to the heart. The custody of this peace is fraternal charity: *Alter alterius onera portate* (Chapter of Sunday), and this Christian law must last forever: *In æternum permanet verbum tuum* (Responsory). The same idea is expressed in the ferial Chapter: *Nemini quidquam debeatis nisi ut invicem diligatis*. If the exhaustion is excessive, let us lift our gaze to Jesus, nailed to the Cross at this Sixth Hour, as *Iesu Christe qui ora sexta crucis patibulum ascendisti...* Before starting to recite this Hour, let us briefly reflect on the troubles and sufferings that await us and implore God's protection, uniting our supplications and acts of resignation with those of Jesus agonizing on the cross amid the most horrible torments of body and soul.

**None.** The sun has already traveled three-quarters of its journey; soon it will disappear beyond the horizon, and darkness will cover the earth. Similarly, earthly things, after a moment of splendor, vanish into nothingness, while God remains immutable! Blessed is he who perseveres in the light of grace until the evening of life! In the Hymn *Rerum Deus tenax vigor*, the Church has us ask God that our life does not end in the darkness of sin but be crowned with eternal glory. The object of this Hour (to be recited in the late afternoon, at 3:00 pm) is, therefore, to obtain perseverance in grace until death, and this prayer is most appropriate at three in the afternoon, when Jesus yielded His spirit to the Father and by His death freed us from hell. United with the crucified Jesus, for the merits of His painful agony, at None we implore from the Heavenly Father the grace of perseverance in virtue, recalling *Empti enim estis pretio magno* (Chapter of Sunday), the inestimable price of our soul, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, so that we may end the day and life holily, as the Church recommends: *In timore incolagus vestri tempore conversamini* (ferial Chapter). And this gift is obtained with prayer: *hoc donum Dei suppliciter emereri potest* (St. Augustine).

**Vespers.** The Synagogue offered to God every evening a figurative sacrifice of that of the divine Word, who, when darkness covered the world, incarnated to accomplish the work of Redemption: *Ad opus suum exiens venit ad vitæ vesperam*, sings the Church. Christians also offered their evening sacrifice, often called the *lucernarium*, because this Hour began with the lighting of the lamps. Vespers is a thanksgiving for the institution of the Eucharist and for the Redemption, the fruit of the Passion, of which the Eucharist is the memorial; hence this Hour is called *Eucharistia lucernaris* or *Gratiarum actio vespertina*. The Vesper Office concludes with the *Magnificat* in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, intimately united with the Son in the work of redemption. The verses: *Dirigatur Domine oratio mea sicut incensum* and *Vespertina oratio* recall the vesperal sacrifice and the sacrifice of incense of the old law and indicate how pleasing to God our fervent prayer is, rising to heaven like incense.

**Compline.** The Compline Office (*Completorium*) “completes,” that is, closes the canonical prayer of the entire day. It aims to obtain the grace of a good night and a holy death: the idea of physical rest and sleep, in fact, naturally recalls that of eternal rest because sleep is not only the image of death but can also be the abrupt transition from this to the next life: *Noctem quietam et finem perfectum*. Who assures us, in fact, that this night we will not awaken in eternity? And then, the dispositions necessary to make a holy death are not improvised at the moment of agony; we must develop and perfect them in ourselves every day of our lives, and this is precisely the purpose the Church assigns to Compline. Therefore, to fully conform to the intention of the Church and prepare for a holy death, let us recite this Office as if during the night we had to appear before Christ the Judge. The Hymn *Te lucis ante terminum* is the evening prayer. It is followed by the commendation of the soul with the touching responsory *In manus tua Domine*. The Canticle of old Simeon, the beautiful antiphon *Salva nos*, and the prayer *Visita quæsumus* conclude this Hour. Finally, the great Marian antiphon makes us rest in Mary's arms. It is an admirable liturgical jewel that exudes piety and poetry. In no other euchologion do we find an evening prayer comparable to it. Let us offer this prayer to the Heavenly Father, in union with Jesus agonizing in Gethsemane, also for those poor souls who this very night will hear the eternal sentence pronounced over them by the Supreme Judge. And these elect will, in turn, assist us, interceding for us in our agony.

Here, then, is the plot of the daily Office, simple and rich at the same time, a plot that imprints a unique direction on our life, continually bringing it back to affective and effective union with Jesus in the Eucharist through prayer and the sanctification of the day. An hourly division, therefore, reflecting the verse of Psalm 118 *Septies in die laudes dixi tibi*, reflecting the seven moments of Our Lord's Passion.

But the unfolding of prayer in time, the sanctification of time by praying at the main hours of the day to nourish daily activities, is not sufficient if it does not arouse in man the capacity and especially the desire to sanctify every moment. This makes man "liturgical," capable of performing every single action always mindful of God's presence, fixing every thought and gesture on Him, becoming a dwelling place of the Spirit; becoming poor for God to be rich in God, free in Him, fully living the hourly prayer as a salvation event, a space made sacred by the presence of Christ for the salvation of man.

As admirably stated by the Carthusian John Justus Lanspergius (1489-1539):

"Dwell assiduously in your inner sanctuary. Do not give yourself to anything with excess, be content with the simple use of present things, of which you must take care when necessary, without attaching your heart to them. Then entrust every event, sad or joyful, to God, be without multiplicity, so that God also may be present to you. Do not wander here and there. Always return to solitude, to inner conversation. Let Him whom you seek be your constant thought, and if you suffer, continue on your way. Always return to interiority where the Truth itself is present. Try not to reach the inconsistent bubbling of words. Keep silence, dwell in peace, endure everything, trust in God, do what is in your power, and soon you will receive wonderful light to know the perfect paths of the interior life" (John Justus Lanspergius, *Speculum christianae perfectionis*, cap. 30, in "*Opera omnia*", IV, 300).

In this way, the members of the Militia, together with the entire Church, deeply animated by the expectation of Christ's glorious return, the desire for His definitive manifestation, remain in vigilant expectation of their Lord: "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mk 13:35-37), to be admitted to His presence, praise Him, and participate in the heavenly liturgy following Christ, by virtue of the universal call to holiness.

## 10 Uninterrupted Prayer

As we have seen, the members of the Militia, during the Office, celebrate God, and the Psalms and Sacred Scripture are the object of their study in *lectio divina*. According to St. Thomas,

*Tamdiu homo orat quamdiu totam vitam suam in Deum ordinat* (Thomas Aquinas, *In Epistolas S. Pauli super Romanos, caput 1, lectio 5*).

Thus a person prays to God as long as they order their whole life to God.

connecting to what St. Augustine said:

*Vita sic canta ut numquam sileas... si ergo laudas, non tantum lingua canta, sed etiam assumpto bonorum psalterio; laudas cum agis negotium, laudes cum cibum et potum capis,*

*laudas cum in lecto requiescis, laudas cum dormis; et quando non laudas?* (Aug. *En. Ps.* 146,2).

Sing with your life, so as never to be silent... if therefore you praise, not only with the tongue sing, but also taking up the psalter of good deeds; you praise when you conduct business, you praise when you eat and drink, you praise when you rest in bed, you praise when you sleep; and when do you not praise?

In this way, they respond to the Lord's command to "pray without ceasing," without forgetting that their entire life must somehow become prayer in a continuous dialogue with God, to whom they offer their entire existence as immersed in time. Such perseverance can only arise from humble and authentic love, for which if "We have not been commanded to work, watch, and fast continuously, (...) unceasing prayer is a law for us":<sup>6</sup>

*Oportet semper orare.*

We must always pray.

## 11 The Divine Office and the Eucharist

The Hours, spanning the entire day, unite the past and future of its daily time, immersing it in the "time of salvation" by virtue of that "memorial" that in this dimension assumes a dual aspect: the "objective" aspect, based on a "praise-thanksgiving" concretely present in the sacrifice of Christ actualized on the altar with universal salvific value, and the "subjective" aspect of personal contact and experiential knowledge in communion with the Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, the Divine Office, spontaneously arising from the Eucharistic Sacrifice through its close relationship with it, becomes its "preparation" and "prolongation," as well as a source of the sanctification of time and, therefore, of man living in time. "Preparation" because, in addition to being primarily a worship of divine majesty, it is also a rich source of instruction for those who pray, preparing them for the encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, helping them to penetrate and understand the marvelous and inspired spiritual beauty of the psalms (the basis of liturgical prayer) and to savor the riches of each part of this form of prayer. "Prolongation," as it does not limit the Eucharistic sacrifice – the central act of the Church's life – to a mere temporal parenthesis, but extends the praise-thanksgiving to the different hours of the day, "distributing" the same Eucharistic celebration with its constitutive elements: praise, thanksgiving, memorial, offering, supplication, and intercessions. In this way, the time of man becomes a "paschal-eucharistic" time, preparation for the next Eucharist.

In a broader sense, therefore, the Divine Office constitutes a celebration of the memorial of the Mysteries of Christ, as in it, and through it, Christ continually carries out His salvific action in the Church; a precious frame inlaid with the colorful enamels of the Feasts that frames the act of the Mass to give it prominence, surrounding it with respect and spreading its sanctifying virtue in souls.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Evagrius Ponticus, *Practical Chapters to Anatolius*, 49.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. *Directorium de Opere Dei persolvendo*.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. A. Choelo, *Corso di Liturgia Romana*, vol. IV, Marietti, Tesino Roma 1937, p. I. 9.

## 12 Meditation and Contemplation

Making every moment of the day a favorable moment to meet the Lord constitutes an ideal occasion for each member of the Militia to deepen their understanding and therefore the objective meaning of Sacred Scripture. The Lord, attentive to the prayers of those who turn to Him with a pure and simple heart, aware of their poverty in the eyes of the Father, comes to meet the soul that desires Him, recreating it from fatigue, nourishing it, refreshing it, and intoxicating it with Himself: an intimacy with God in prayer where one allows oneself to be captured by the presence of the Lord and remains with Him and in Him, in the utmost simplicity (*contemplatio*) through the elevation of the mind towards Him and the overcoming of all senses to taste the joys of eternal sweetness in a purity of heart (*puritas cordis*) achieved through a path of asceticism and purification from all sin.

## 13 The Dimension of Silence

It is possible to fully honor God not only through the normal forms of prayer that involve the sound of words or the melody of song, but also in silence, so that human individuality loses its contours, mystically uniting with the One and listening becomes life.<sup>9</sup> Solitude and silence are therefore the ideal environment in which the Word of God finds its full resonance, and in the relationship between man and his Creator, silence replaces the word when that relationship becomes perfect; a silence, therefore, not empty but in which there is a mutual exchange that opens up to the inspirations and urgings of the Spirit.

An “inner silence” obtained by calming every desire, passion, or material concern and removing everything that, within one’s soul, may constitute an obstacle, a “noise” resulting from an impure heart that is not, therefore, doing the will of God (“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”<sup>10</sup>), to live which, however, an “outer silence” is essential, achieved by depriving oneself of one’s word, “becoming silence,” detaching oneself from one’s will and way of perceiving things.<sup>11</sup> Only those who have descended deeply into their solitude, moved by love, inner poverty, and humility of heart,<sup>12</sup> allowing the soul to experience the desert where the Word of God can resonate to lead a true spiritual life, will be able to meet God and become truly capable of having relationships with others, reduced to what is essential.

Only this silence can restore to the word its original vocation, that is, to express the transparency of the truth of man’s being, become a bond of communion, evoke profound dimensions, rich in meaning and creativity.

The monastic aspect of the members of the Militia’s vocation urges the latter to undertake a real journey towards interiority, so that before being an ascetic practice, silence should be understood as a highly vital and constitutive element. Monastic sensitivity makes men and women of silence, of God, of prayer, of solitude, who consider “taciturnity” essential, that is, the tendency to interiority, tranquility, and both physical and spiritual quiet, the habit of noticing silence, the voluntary and virtuous love for it, fruit of humility and recollection, the ability to express oneself with moderation and discretion, only when necessary. Silence, therefore, is not a value in itself, but a necessary condition for living listening,

---

<sup>9</sup>Cf. M. B. Zorzi, *Autonomia della musica e mistica cristiana. Lo iubilus in Agostino di Ippona*, in [mondodomani.org/reportata/zorzi01.htm](http://mondodomani.org/reportata/zorzi01.htm).

<sup>10</sup>Mt 5:8

<sup>11</sup>Cf. J. B. Porion, *Amore e silenzio*, La Certosa, Serra San Bruno 1993

<sup>12</sup>Cf. RB 20

giving an authentic dimension to mystical and contemplative prayer, and restoring to the Word its weight of reality and meaning.

## 14 How to Recite the Divine Office

The guidelines provided by Pius XII's Encyclicals *Musicae sacrae disciplina* and *Mediator Dei* are particularly clear regarding the methods to be adopted for the recitation of the Divine Office.

The Divine Office can be recited either "in choir" (if it is a community canonically obligated to the choir), or "in common," or "alone." However, in whatever way it is recited by those who are assigned to it by the Rule, it must always be considered a public act of worship rendered to God in the name of the Church. Given this, the recitation of the Office "in choir" should be preserved and promoted; the recitation "in common," as well as the singing of at least some parts of the Office, depending on the conditions of the places, times, and persons, is highly recommended.

In Chapter Five of the Rule ("Of the Divine Office") we read:

"Mindful of what the Lord has said: "Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there am I in their midst," let the Knights strive to recite the Office as much as possible in common, in the precise observance of the prescribed ceremonial. And this is especially true for the hour of Vespers. When a Knight is prevented from reciting the Office, he says a *Pater Noster*, ten *Ave Marias*, a *Gloria Patri*, and a *Requiem Aeternam*.

The Dames should join the Knights as often as possible in the common recitation of the Office, and it is commendable that they also recite it alone. However, they can calmly say a mystery of the Holy Rosary for the good of the Militia".

The integrity of the Office is not compromised when sung in alternating choirs, or if someone, engaged in necessary choir functions, like the organist, omits to recite a verse or even an entire psalm: indeed, as they say, *chorus supplet* (the choir supplies). One who plays the organ while the choir sings can fulfill the obligation if they intelligibly sing alternate verses with a part of the choir and respond with it to the parts of the Office common to the entire choir. Even in private recitation, it is possible to say the Office alternately with one or more confreres to facilitate devotion. Moreover, efforts should be made not to interrupt the recitation of the individual Hours of the Office, except for just causes, which, according to St. Alphonsus, are: "any own or others' utility that, if deferred, causes inconvenience".

## 15 Gestures in Hourly Prayer

In Chapter Fifteen of the Rule ("How to Recite the Office") we read:

When the Chapter meets to render the tribute of praise to the Almighty Lord and Our Lady, it should do so with humility and reverence and observing the liturgical prescriptions.

At the *Gloria Patri* and when the Holy Trinity is mentioned elsewhere, one should stand up and make a deep bow, as well as at the *Pater Noster*, which the Master or his representative recites alone as head of the community up to "...*et ne nos inducas in tentationem*" so that all respond "*sed libera nos a malo*".

The Office can be recited privately in any place and position, provided the necessary attention and due respect are guaranteed, avoiding inappropriate places or doing other things that reveal irreverence towards the Divine Majesty.

The recitation of the Psalms and all other components of the Divine Office involves the entire person: the body because the mouth pronounces the text, the memory retains it, the intellect strives to penetrate its meaning, the will proposes to put it into practice in daily life. And the spirit and heart because they adhere to what the mouth pronounces in an inner abandonment that trusts in the flow of words arising from attentive reading of sacred texts. The soul alone, even with the aid of knowledge and experience, being unable to fully elevate itself to God, necessarily needs prayer to make itself fruitful and to return to God the word received and made its own.

For these reasons, therefore, hourly prayer involves a set of gestures specified by the *Ritus servandus*, each having its precise spiritual significance. It is, therefore, the body itself that prays, alternating between **sitting** (during readings and their responses; during the psalmody – it is advisable to sit even before the antiphon, possibly leaving those who proclaim it standing; this to avoid movements while performing a chant or reciting a formula; nothing, however, prevents standing during the singing of some psalms) and **standing** (introductions, hymns, evangelical canticles, petitions, prayers); kneeling to ask for forgiveness (**genuflexion**: straight/*recta* if the torso remains vertical with the knees touching the ground, arms more or less detached from the body and hands joined; inclined/*proclivis* if the torso bends); bowing (**bowing the head**: at the name of Jesus, Mary, and the Saint of the day, receiving Trinitarian blessings) deeply (**inclinatio**: at the end of the Psalms – *Gloria Patri*; the bending of the body from the waist can be medium/*semi plena* if the torso remains oblique, or profound/*plena* if it is horizontal); making the sign of the cross (**large sign of the cross**: at the beginning of the individual Hours – *Deus in adiutorium*, the evangelical canticles of Lauds – *Benedictus* and Vespers – *Magnificat* and Compline – *Nunc Dimittis*; for the Trinitarian Blessing at Lauds and Vespers; at the Concluding Verse of Compline – *Divinum Auxilium*; at the Verse *Auditorium nostrum*); wearing the hood (at certain moments of prayer in the choir allows internalizing prayer, almost as if to remind one of being in the world but not of the world. It is about bringing prayer into the heart to give it strength and make it true), and even breathing in the mystical and harmonious exercise of sung prayer. In the psalms, there are many such invitations to praise God.<sup>13</sup>

These gestures, each containing a profound symbolic significance, allowing the body to favor the expression of the soul and, consequently, the soul to ensure that the body is enriched by what it lives, are prescribed only for the choral or common recitation, but nothing prevents their application even for private recitation.

These are movements that constantly stimulate the body to become one with the voice and prayer so that the vibration born in sound finds immediate resonance and amplification in the body and vice versa, thus making the desire of the praying faithful more intense. For the members of the Militia, the Office is an act of justice, giving to God what is God's, not a surplus, a burden imposed on them but extrinsic to their vocation.

## 16 The Office Must Be Recited Orally or Vocally

The Office is the public prayer of the Church, so it must always be said aloud, “pronouncing” it, under penalty of its non-fulfillment if recited only mentally or skimmed with the eyes. It follows that each word

---

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Ps 46:1; 62:5; 76:3; 87:10; 28:2; 131:7, etc



must be produced with the mouth, lips, and tongue, even in private recitation, so that the one who prays is truly aware of pronouncing them. It is not required that those around hear, indeed in private recitation, it is better not to disturb them. In choral recitation, however, each chorister must recite or sing the Office alternately: it is not required that each one is heard by the opposite choir, it is enough to be heard by those nearby, conveniently helping with one's voice so that each part of the choir can dignify the other.

## 17 The Office Must Be Recited with Intention and Due Attention

The intention required is to pray to God, honor Him, and adore Him and is best expressed with the words of the prayer *Aperi Domine*, which can be said before the Hours:

*Domine, in unione illius divinæ intentionis, qua ipse in terris laudes Deo persolvisti, has tibi Horas persolvo.*

Lord, I offer You these Hours in union with that divine intention with which You, on earth, fulfilled praises to God [the Father].

Moreover, attention is twofold:

- external attention concerns external acts such as reading the Breviary and correctly turning the pages, avoiding possible distractions;
- internal attention is reserved for the words of the prayer, pronounced correctly, their exact understanding, and the purpose of the prayer; it excludes internal distractions like wandering thoughts.

Finally, it is useful to synthetically indicate some valid remedies to avoid distractions:

- at the beginning of the Office, form the explicit intention to praise God;
- renew this intention at the Gloria Patri or at the beginning of each Psalm;
- mentally envision some Mystery of the Passion during the recitation of the Office;
- carefully guard the senses;
- perform the external gestures of the body carefully and with reverence;
- preferably recite the Office on one's knees before the Blessed Sacrament rather than sitting or lying down unless there is a reasonable cause;
- study the correct meaning of the Psalms and other things said in the Office: distractions often arise because the true meaning of what is being recited is not understood.