

Reader Services

In this class, we're going to look at liturgical services conducted without a priest – often called “Reader Services,” since they are led by a reader or cantor.

The Daily Liturgical Cycle in the Byzantine Rite

In the Byzantine Rite, the following services can be served every day of the year:

- The **Midnight Office** (a nighttime vigil)
- **Matins**, the Church's solemn morning prayer – ending just after dawn
- The **First Hour**, a short service around 7 AM
- The **Third Hour**, a short service around 9 AM
- (the Divine Liturgy would normally go here)
- The **Sixth Hour**, a short service at noon
- The **Ninth Hour**, a short service around 3 PM
- **Vespers**, the Church's solemn evening prayer – beginning around sunset
- **Compline**, a service of medium length before bedtime

The Divine Liturgy is celebrated on Saturdays, Sundays, and feastsdays, and MAY be celebrated on ordinary weekdays, except for certain “aliturghical” days – like the weekdays of the Great Fast. On days when the Divine Liturgy is not celebrated, a short service called **Typika** may be held. This office probably began as a monastic Communion service, and may be held after the Third or Ninth Hour, or at any convenient time.

Sometimes the daily services other than the Divine Liturgy are referred to as the **Divine Praises**. Each of them can be celebrated without a priest

The 1996 *Liturgical Instruction* for the Eastern Catholic Churches stated that: “Where such practice of celebrating the Divine Praises with the people has diminished, if not completely disappeared, the ancient tradition should be restored without delay, so as not to deprive the faithful of a privileged source of prayer, nourished by treasures of authentic doctrine.”

Reader services are one way to allow the faithful to take part in the Church's worship in this privileged way, even if no priest is available.

General Guidelines for Reader Services

When the Divine Praises are celebrated without a priest, a deacon, reader, or lay person may lead the service. If there is a cantor, it is usually better if the cantor NOT be the leader as well. Note that where the instructions say “say” or “read”, it is to be assumed that simple chanting is used. The sole exception is the Gospel, which is read in a normal speaking voice.

- In place of the priest’s opening blessing, the leader says: “Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.” And the people respond, “Amen.”
- In place of the priest’s exclamation after the Our Father (“For thine is the kingdom...”), the leader says the communal version of the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us.” And the people respond, “Amen.”
- In place of the Litany of Peace (“In peace, let us pray to the Lord”) and the Litany of Fervent Supplication (“Let us all say with our whole soul...” or “Have mercy on us, O God...”), the people chant “Lord, have mercy” forty times, then “Glory to the Father.... Now and ever... Amen.”
- In place of the Litany of Supplication (“Let complete our prayer to the Lord”), the people chant “Lord, have mercy” twelve times, then “Glory to the Father.... Now and ever... Amen.”
- In place of the Small Litany (“Again and again, in peace, let us pray to the Lord”), the people chant “Lord, have mercy” three times, then “Glory to the Father.... Now and ever... Amen.”
- All other priestly and diaconal exclamations are omitted.
- However, where a prayer says “Priest (or leader):”, it may be read by someone other than a priest
- When the Gospel is read (at Matins or Typica), it is read in a normal speaking voice by a reader facing East (from the nave toward the sanctuary).
- The dismissals for each service are described below.

These guidelines may also be used for prayer in the home. But note that they are *unofficial*, and superceded by any directives from your pastor or bishop.

Midnight Office as a Reader Service

After the Prayer of the Hours, in the place of “In the name of the Lord, Reverend Father, bless” and the priest’s prayer (“May God be gracious to us...”), the leader says: “Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.” And the people respond, “Amen.”

In place of the priest’s dismissal which begins “Glory to you, Christ God, our hope”, the following conclusion is used:

People: Glory... now and ever...
Lord, have mercy (3 times)

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.

People: Amen.

Matins as a Reader Service

The leader chants the verses after “The Lord is God...”

If it is a feast day, the festal icon is not enthroned, but may be placed on the tetrapod for veneration. Otherwise a gospel book may be placed on the tetrapod, but not the one kept on the holy table.

If there is a Gospel reading, the leader chants the verses after “Let everything that lives and that breaths.” But the dialog between the priest and deacon before the Gospel is omitted. The reader announces the Gospel in a normal voice: “A reading of the holy Gospel according to <name>”, and then proceeds to read, facing the sanctuary from the nave.

If a deacon leads the service, he may say the prayer “Save your people, O God...” to which the people respond, “Amen.” The triple “Lord have mercy” and the following priestly prayer are omitted.

If a deacon leads the service, he may exclaim: “Let us greatly extol the Theotokos and the Mother of Light in hymns.” Otherwise this is omitted.

The Prayer over Bowed Heads is omitted, and in place of the priest’s dismissal which begins with “Wisdom! R. Give the blessing.”, the following conclusion is used:

People: More honorable than the Cherubim....
Glory... now and ever...
Lord, have mercy (3 times)

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.

People: Amen.

The Hours (First, Third, Sixth, and Ninth) as Reader Services

After the Prayer of the Hours, in place “In the name of the Lord, Reverend Father, bless” and the priest’s prayer (“May God be gracious to us...” or “Through the prayers of our holy fathers...”), the leader says: “Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.” And the people respond, “Amen.”

The leader says the final prayer of the hour, to which the people do not respond “Amen.” The priest’s dismissal is omitted.

Vespers as a Reader Service

The leader chants the verses after the evening prokeimenon.

The Prayer over Bowed Heads is omitted.

If Litija is appointed, then a procession may be made to the narthex while the hymns of litija are sung. In the leader is a deacon, he may say the prayer “Save your people, O God....” Then the people sing “Lord, have mercy” forty times, and go in procession back into the church while the aposticha are sung. Bread is not blessed or distributed.

In place of the priest’s dismissal which begins with “Wisdom! R. Give the blessing.”, the following conclusion is used:

People: More honorable than the Cherubim....
Glory... now and ever...
Lord, have mercy (3 times)

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.

People: Amen.