

11. A Brief Introduction to Vespers, Orthros, and Other Services

Besides the Divine Liturgy, the Church offers the following services to the glory of God, and to help us “redeem the time” (Eph. 5:16). These include the services of the daily cycle, as well as some used for special occasions (though not every kind of service is listed here):

Vespers, an evening service, begins the daily liturgical cycle. In accordance with both Jewish and ancient Christian practice, the day begins with sunset (Gen. 1). Like most of the Church’s services, Vespers is built around particular Psalms, such as Psalm 103 (104) and Psalm 140 (141).^{*} Its central moment is the singing of “O Gladsome Light,” one of the Church’s most ancient hymns. On Saturday evenings and feast days, “Great Vespers,” which is more festive and has a slightly different order, replaces daily Vespers.

Compline is a late-evening, before-bedtime service; its Greek name, “Apodeipnon,” literally means “after dinner.” It includes Psalms, the Nicene Creed, and prayers before sleep. A special Great Compline service is appointed for the Lenten season before Pascha.

A service seen rarely in parishes and more often in monasteries is the **Midnight Office**. It is traditionally done at Midnight, as part of a night vigil. Practically, it is often done a little later in the morning, sometimes combined with Orthros.

Orthros means “morning” or “dawn.” It is the early morning service, traditionally at the break of dawn, though practically served at varying times. It begins with a series of Psalms (the “Six Psalms”) during the reading of which it is customary *not* to make our usual crosses and bows. By tradition, our Guardian Angels will read these Psalms for us at the Last Judgement, which is why we stand perfectly still. Orthros may contain a Gospel reading (on Sundays or special feast days). Like Vespers and Compline, it also has “Litanies,” series of petitions offered by the priest or deacon, to which the people respond with “Lord have mercy,” or “Grant this, O Lord.” On Sundays or feast days it ends with the Great Doxology, which precedes the beginning of Divine Liturgy (in Antiochian and certain other traditions).

The Hours are an inheritance from the Jewish custom of punctuating the day with prayer at the 1st Hour (6 or 7am), 3rd Hour (9am), 6th Hour (Noon), and 9th Hour (3pm). These times also mark various points in the Evangelists’ accounts of the Lord’s crucifixion. In practice, they are sometimes combined back-to-back, or particular hours might be used on particular days. A service called **Typika** rounds out the daily cycle, following 6th or 9th Hour, and sometimes replacing the Liturgy, depending on context.

Akathists are extended poetic prayers offered to the Lord, or in thanksgiving for the Mother of God, other particular Saints, or for feast days.

Paraklesis (Greek/Antiochian practice) or **Molieben** (Slavic practice) services offer prayers of supplication for particular purposes (and sometimes addressed to particular Saints, such as the Mother of God), generally praying for those with particular needs or in thanksgiving.

Sacramental services (**Holy Mysteries**) are offered as needed, and include Baptisms, Chrismations, Holy Matrimony, and Holy Unction (anointing).

^{*}*The numbering of the Psalms found in the Greek (Septuagint) Old Testament is different from that found in the Hebrew Scriptures.*