Using the Book of Common Prayer for Daily Devotions

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For Episcopalians and many others, the Book of Common Prayer is a treasure house of personal devotion, strength and encouragement. It is far more than a book of worship to be used on Sunday mornings in Church.

The Book of Common Prayer (referred to by Episcopalians simply as the BCP) was developed by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in the latter part of the 16th century as a means to simplify worship and make it more accessible to the average worshipper since most of the Church's services were in Latin. He also wanted to encourage lay people to become familiar with the Holy Bible and to practice daily prayer. His work was based on the ancient liturgies of the church and devotions that were integral to religious communities, especially those developing from the Benedictine tradition.

The Book of Common Prayer ("common" referring to its use by ALL people, not just the clergy) stands with the King James version of the Holy Bible as influencing the development of the English language and inspiring such great writers as William Shakespeare.

The BCP has been revised many times since it first appeared in 1549, and has been adapted to meet the needs of the Anglican Churches throughout the world. It has been translated into many different languages - - yet it maintains the same structure and many of the same prayers and liturgies found in the English and American Prayer Books. Our present prayer book was revised in 1979.

Central to all editions of the BCP are the daily offices of morning and evening prayer. The word "office" in this case takes us back through the centuries when "office" meant a dedicated work, and recalls Saint Benedict's saying that "prayer is work and work is prayer." Certainly prayer is the essential work of all Christians. What the Book of Common Prayer does is provide a structure, which includes all elements of prayer: Adoration, Thanksgiving, Confession, and Supplication (intercession and petition) ...The A_C_T's of prayer.

Today, millions of Anglicans and other Christians use the BCP daily, and in many Anglican churches the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer are said and/or sung every day of the year. As we enter into this ancient form of prayer and devotion, we are enabled to join with them in "lifting our hearts" to God.
HOW TO USE THE PRAYER BOOK FOR DAILY DEVOTION

There are a few things we need to know to get started:

1. Find the proper day. Refer to the Calendar on page 31, which gives the seasons and the major feast days throughout the year. It is very helpful to have an Episcopal Church calendar, or make use of the Sunday program, which tells which Sunday of the year is being observed. In addition the booklet "Forward Day by Day" is highly recommended. It provides the essential information necessary to find the correct day in addition to a short meditation.

2. Locate the Prayer Book office you wish to use. Rite I is written in "traditional" language; Rite 2 is in "contemporary" language.

3. Before you begin, find and mark the Psalm for the day as well as the lesson or lessons. These are found in the BCP beginning on page 934. Year One refers to readings in odd years (1997). Year Two refers to readings in even years (1998)

4. You may wish to pray the collect for Sunday during the week. It is helpful to be reminded of what the Church is praying for at that time. Place a marker at the page on which the collect for the day is printed (these begin with page 159 for Traditional and 211 for Contemporary texts). The collects after Pentecost are dated which is a great help in finding the correct propers for the season.)

5. In addition to your prayer book and Bible, you may wish to include: (1) a simple Bible Commentary to refer to if the lesson is particularly difficult to understand; (2) The "Weekly Guides for Bible Readings" (Years One and Two) by Joseph P. Russell - published by Forward Movement and available in the Cathedral Bookshop; (3) Daily Readings for Years One and Two also available in the Bookshop. Be sure you have a GOOD contemporary translation of the Bible. We recommend the version we use most at the Cathedral: The New Revised Standard Version. DO NOT USE A PARAPHRASED VERSION ("The Living Bible.")

6. Determine in advance both the TIME that is best for you as well as a PLACE where you can "be still... "Some prefer the early morning, others before bedtime, and still others pray the office both morning and evening. In the beginning you may do well to decide on either morning or evening prayer, but not both.

PRAYING THE OFFICE:

1. Morning Prayer begins with an opening sentence. (Page 75-78) This sentence sets the tone for the office.

2. The Confession and Absolution (words of forgiveness) are optional

3. The "dialogue" parts ("The Lord be with you" and etc.) are usually omitted when one is reading the office by oneself. If two or more are reading the office together, one should take the part of the officiant.

4. The Invitatory and Psalter. Once again we have a sentence that sets the tone depending on the season of the year, and this is followed by one of three canticles (songs): The
Venite, the Jubilate, or the Pascha Nostrum (which is appropriate only for the Easter season).

5. The Psalm for the day follows. The Psalter begins on page 585. It is a good idea to mark the psalm in advance, and also note if some verses are omitted (an example of this is Psalm 137).

6. The First reading (lesson) follows the Psalm. The number of readings will depend on whether or not you are reading both Morning and Evening Prayer or if you are using only one of these offices. Since three readings are provided for most days, you may find it best to use two in the morning or one in the evening. These are "serial" readings except for special days, so make your choice and plan to stay with it until the series is completed. If you are reading only one office - - it is suggested that one of the two readings be the Gospel lesson.

7. After the first reading, select one of the canticles. It is helpful to enjoy a variety of readings during the week: (see page 144)
   - Sunday: Canticles 16 and 21 (Advent: 11 and 16; Lent: 14 and 16; Easter: 8 and 16)
   - Monday: Canticles 9 and 19
   - Tuesday: Canticles 13 and 18
   - Wednesday: Canticles 11 (14 during Lent) and 16
   - Thursday: Canticles 8 and 20 (19 during Advent and Lent)
   - Friday: Canticles 10 (14 during Lent) and 18
   - Saturday: Canticles 12 and 19 (12 can be divided into three parts)

8. Following the Second Lesson, the Apostles Creed may be said, followed by the prayers:
   - The Lord's Prayer
   - The Suffrages may be omitted if one is reading the office alone
   - The Collect for the Day
   - The Prayers
   - The prayers on page 98 to 100 (morning prayer) and 123 and 124 for Evening Prayer
   - Friday, Saturday, and Sunday Collects are provided:
     - For Monday: Renewal of Life
     - For Tuesday: Peace
     - For Wednesday: Grace
     - For Thursday: Guidance
   - These prayers are followed by prayers for Mission:
     - Prayer one: Sunday and Wednesday
     - Prayer two: Monday, Thursday and Saturday
Prayer three: Tuesday and Friday

One may end the reading of the office here or by saying the General Thanksgiving, the Prayer of Saint Chrysostom, and one of the three conclusions.

Some practical suggestions:

1. You should feel comfortable with what you are doing. When you become used to its order, praying the office seem very natural. The secret is to prepare in advance so that there will be a minimum of searching for pages.


3. After each of reading, be still. Reflect. Question what God may want to say to you through the reading. (Not every reading may be spiritually edifying but may nonetheless provide insight.)

4. Do not hurry through the Psalm or the prayers. Read reflectively. Be open to the Holy Spirit.

5. Following the reading of the office, you may wish to read the meditation from "Forward Day by Day".

6. Before you leave your place, thank God for his Presence with you, and ask him to be with you in whatever you are going to do or wherever you are going to be.

7. Finally: you allow the reading of the office to be incorporated with your personal prayers and intercessions. You may wish to keep a list of names for those for whom you are praying.

Feel perfectly free to adapt the Daily Office to your own needs, making any changes additions or omissions that you find helpful.

And remember ... every time you pray the office, you are praying it with thousands of people around the world who are also engaged in prayer.