

MATINS, COMPLINE, WHAT THEY WERE

While watching the great television series CADFAEL, I repeatedly heard the words MATINS and COMPLINE used. One of the monks would say something such as, “We’ll do that after Compline” or “I saw them just before Matins.” I never knew what they were talking about and thought, would only a monk use these words?

HOW WRONG I WAS

As you’ll know from my previous articles, I’m a lifelong Catholic who, in my sixties, realised I knew very little about my religion but then started to use the Internet to find out more. I was now back in research mode.

I soon found out that as Catholics we do hear or read the words LAUDS, MATINS, VESPERS, TERCE, SEXT and COMPLINE, but how many know what they are or mean? The following is a simple explanation.

At the time of Jesus, the Hebrews set aside times of the day for praying and praising God. The new Christians thought this a great idea and adopted it. Today’s version of the Catholic church is called:

THE BREVIARY.

The following is a short explanation for Lay-Catholics. It’s a practice of:

WORSHIPING GOD AT SPECIFIC TIMES OF THE DAY.

It’s made up of psalms, readings, hymns and antiphons. Together with the mass, they make up the official public prayer life of the church and are organised into the following major and minor hours:

MAJOR

Lauds or morning prayer

Matins also called VIGIL (during the night, at about 2 a.m.)

Vespers or Evening Prayer (at about 6 p.m.)

MINOR

Daytime Prayer – one or more hours.

Terce or Midmorning Prayer before Noon

Sext or Midday Prayer

Compline or Night Prayer – Last prayer of the day around 7.00pm.

As well as The Breviary, the liturgical Book of the Roman Catholic Church is also known as:

- THE DIVINE OFFICE
- LITURGY OF THE HOURS
- WORK OF GOD
- CANONICAL HOURS

It's an obligation undertaken by priests and deacons intending to become priests. Deacons intending to remain deacons must recite only a part of it. Ordinary Lay-Catholics are not obliged to take part, but may decide to do so with priests, or among themselves, or even individually.

Before the COVID pandemic, some of our parishioners, including myself, used to recite these prayers with our priest before morning mass, using the Breviary booklets for use by parishioners.

I found these special psalms, readings, hymns, and antiphons inspiring, but until my research into Matins and Compline, I never knew that they were part of a special ritual of the Catholic Church.

I don't know why, but now, whenever I hear these words spoken by actors playing someone from a religious order, I smile to myself and wonder if they know what these words mean.

Most Catholic churches have books containing the Breviary for ordinary lay Catholics to use. Still, if you would like your own copy, you can usually purchase one from a supplier of Catholic literature.