

When No Priest is Available

Reading the Service Books While Traveling or at Home

by Archpriest Sergei Shukin

Webmaster Note: The article that follows is over fifteen years old. You will want to check out Fr. John [Whiteford's Liturgical Texts and Resources Site](#) for more recommendations on [current liturgical materials](#) available in English. Nevertheless, this article is still timely due to current world events that could easily result in many Orthodox Christians being cut off from their parish churches, if not openly persecuted. It behooves all those who love Christ and His Holy Church to know, and to have the materials to do, the Divine Services so that they may be carried on regardless of one's ability to attend church.

This article is admittedly out-of-date. A plethora of service books has appeared since this was first published, especially from St. John of Kronstadt Press. I do not have time to research what changes should be made to this article. I am asking that those more knowledgeable about these things than I please email me any corrections they think should be made to this compilation. Also, any changes resulting from variations in Greek practice are also welcome. I will update the article and announce the major changes, as a service to all. Thank you.

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When Orthodox people have no opportunity to attend Orthodox divine services, especially in non-Orthodox countries, then the Church allows and encourages individuals and groups of Orthodox to read the service books privately, for the preservation of their faith. Such readings have long been customary in monastic establishments, hospitals, schools, on shipboard and, in recent times, by Orthodox in the USSR and in the diaspora. Reading prayer books or service books may, at least to some extent, replace church services.

Besides preserving our Orthodox faith, reading services is beneficial because:

1. It teaches us, even in non-Orthodox lands, to remember and honor Orthodox feasts and saints' days.
2. It acquaints us with the order of church services and with the profound content of our service books.
3. It safeguards us from the danger of sectarian and heterodox influence
4. It helps parents and teachers raise their children and young adults in the spirit of Orthodoxy.
5. It unites dispersed Orthodox people in our faith and love for the Orthodox Church.

Orthodox Divine Services

The daily ecclesiastical office consists of a cycle of services that covers the entire 24-hour period. Since the church day begins with the evening, the order of daily services is: 1) [Vespers](#), 2) [Small Compline](#), 3) [Midnight Office](#), 4) [Matins](#), 5) [First Hour](#), 6) [Third and Sixth Hours](#), 7) the Liturgy and 8) [Ninth Hour](#). Orthodox laymen may read or chant some portion of all of these, except the Divine Liturgy, which is replaced by the [Typica](#).

In addition, it is permissible to read [canons and akathists](#), either separately or as part of another service.

A canon is a collection of hymns in nine odes that honors the Savior, the Mother of God, a saint, a holy day, or a spiritual theme.

An akathist is a song of praise in twelve parts that glorifies the Savior, the Mother of God, a saint.... An akathist may be read or sung, or read with the refrains sung. [1]

How Laymen Read Service Books

The reading of service books should be conducted according to the following rules:

1. All [reader's] services are to begin with the exclamation: "Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.
2. All the priest's prayers and exclamations are omitted.

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3. In place of the Great and Augmented Ectenias and the Ectenia of Supplication, "Lord, have mercy" is said twelve times; in place of the Small Ectenia, three times.

4. The Gospel is not intoned, but read in an ordinary voice.

Note: Every Orthodox Christian is obliged to read the Gospel privately, according to the ecclesiastical lectionary found in church calendars.

5. All other hymns, psalms and prayers are read or sung as when a priest serves.

6. The Typica (in place of the liturgy) may be read as indicated in Appendix 1.

The Order of Services on Feast Days

Since laymen are often involved with work and may not have time to read services in the ordinary week days, we shall give directions only for the festal services. [2]

On weekdays, the daily morning and evening prayers could be combined with Small Compline and Midnight Office, as desired.

On feast days, it is important to devote more time to God and to observe the feast with the appropriate reading and hymns. On the eve of the feast one may read Vespers, Matins and the First Hour, in the place of the All-Night Vigil. In the morning, one may read the Midnight Office, the Third and Sixth Hours, if desired, and the Typica. The evening of the feast, one should read the Small Compline with the proper canon or akathist of the feast.

The order and content of the services depend on the free time available and on the service books at hand. Here are more detailed instructions for three kinds of feasts: 1) Sundays, 2) the Twelve Great Feasts and other holidays of the Lord and of the Mother of God, 3) saints' days, our name-saints or ones we especially venerate.

1) Sundays

On Saturday evenings we read Vespers, including the stichera and troparia according to the tone indicated in the calendar. In the morning (or on the eve), we read Matins and the First Hour. At Matins we may read the Resurrection canon for the appropriate tone, or, if not available, the Canon to Our Sweetest Lord Jesus (in the prayers of preparation for Holy Communion) may be substituted. 'Me stichera for the aposticha, the troparia and the theotokia are according to the tone of the Sunday.

If Vespers and Matins are unavailable, then on Saturday night one may read Small Compline with the Canon and Akathist to our Sweetest Lord Jesus.

On Sunday morning we should read: the Midnight Office for Sunday, with the morning prayers and the Typica (the order for Typica is given in Appendix I).

Finally, on Sunday evening, we may read Small Compline with a canon to the Mother of God (either to one of her wonder-working icons or any other available).

2) Feasts of the Lord and of the Theotokos

On these feasts, including all of the Twelve Great Feasts, it is customary to read the proper service from the Festal Menaion. Vespers and Matins according to the Vigil are read, while the stichera, troparia, etc., come from the Festal Menaion. The canon of Matins is to the Lord or to the Theotokos, depending on the feast.

If the Festal Menaion is unavailable, then one may read Vespers (or perhaps Small Compline) with the canon or corresponding akathist, and one may take the stichera from the General Menaion, using the "General Service for the Feasts of the Lord" or "of the Mother of God."

In the morning: the Third and Sixth Hours and the Typica, with the troparia and kontakia of the feast sung in the proper places.

In the evening: Small Compline with the Canon of Repentance to Our Lord Jesus Christ, or the Supplicatory Canon to the Most Holy Theotokos (Paraclesis).

3) Saints' days

If there is a service to the saint in the Festal Menaion, then Vespers, Matins and the First Hour are read as usual, with the stichera, troparia, etc., from the Menaion. If there is no service to the saint, then we read from the General Menaion, taking the stichera, etc., from the general service to the class of saint being commemorated: i.e., to a hierarch, to a monastic, to a martyr, etc. At the polyeleos or perhaps at the end of the service, we chant the megalynarion to the saint (see Appendix II). In the appropriate places we insert the name of the saint being commemorated.

If neither the Horologion nor the Menaion is available, then we may read Small Compline with the canon or akathist to the saint, if available. (A church dedicated to that saint might allow us to copy the proper canon or akathist, so that we might read it on a nameday or other feast days.)

In the morning, we read the Midnight Office, the Hours and the Typica, with the troparia and kontakia to the saint at the Hours, and the kontakia of the temple, and of the saint or the day of the week, at the Typica.

In the evening, we read the canon to the saint; but if there is none, then the canon for Saturday to all the saints.

Appendix I. The Order of the Typica

Beginning: Psalm 102, "Bless the Lord, O my soul..."

Glory to the Father...

Psalm 145, "Praise the Lord, O my soul..."

Both now and ever...

"O Only-begotten Son and Word of God..."

The Beatitudes.

Glory... Both now...

The Symbol of Faith (the Creed, I believe...), and the prayer: "Remit, pardon, forgive, O God, our offences, both voluntary and involuntary, in deed and word, in knowledge and in ignorance, by night and by day, in mind and thought; forgive us all things, since -Thou art good and the Lover of mankind.

The Lord's Prayer.

The kontakion of the feast or of the day of the week.

Glory... Both now... And ending with the prayer: "O protection of Christians that cannot be put to shame, O mediation unto the Creator unfailling, disdain not the suppliant voices of sinners; but be thou quick, O good one, to help us who in faith cry unto thee: Hasten to intercession and speed thou to make supplication, thou who dost ever protect, O Theotokos, them that honor thee."

During Great Lent, in place of this prayer, we end thus:

Lord, have mercy. 40 times. Glory... Both now... More honorable than the Cherubim... And the prayer, "O Lord and Master of my life...", with 16 prostrations.

Appendix II. Megalynaria to Various Saints.

To an Apostle: We magnify thee (pl., you), O Apostle(s) of Christ, N. (or NN.), and we honor thy (your) pains and labors, with which thou hast (you have) labored in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.

To a Hierarch: We magnify thee (you), O holy Hierarch(s), Father(s) N. (or NN.), and we honor thy (your) holy memory, for thou dost (you do) pray for us to Christ our God.

To a Monastic Saint: We glorify thee (you), O holy Father(s) N. (NN.), and we honor thy (your) holy memory, instructor(s) of monks and converser(s) with angels.

To a Martyr: We magnify thee (you), O holy (Great-)Martyr(s) N. (NN.), and we honor thy (your) precious sufferings, which thou didst (you did) endure for Christ.

The megalynaria, of the Twelve Great Feasts and other holy days are found in the Festal Menaion.

Appendix III. Service Books: A Revised List.**In Slavonic**

1. *Velikij Sbornik*. In three parts and five books. Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y. 13361. Part I, Horologion, Sunday Octoechos and General Menaion with canons and the Epistle readings for Sundays. 588 pp. \$28.
2. *Velikij Sbornik*. Part II, Book 1. Festal Menaion. Great feasts and important saints' days. September through February. 524 pp. \$26.
3. *Velikij Sbornik*. Part 11, Book 2. Festal Menaion. March through August. 346 pp. \$24.
4. *Velikij Sbornik*. Part III, Book 1. Lenten Triodion. Contains the full services for the first week of Great Lent and for Holy Week, as well as for Sundays and other feasts in the Triodion period. 608 pp. \$30.
5. *Velikij Sbornik*. Part III, Book 2. Pentecostarion. Contains the services for Pascha and Bright Week in full, as well as for Sundays and feast days in the Pentecostarion period through the feast of All Saints of Russia. 375 pp. \$26.
6. *Velikij Chasoslov* (The Great Horologion). Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y. 13361. The daily office, the fixed portions in full, morning and evening prayers, troparia and kontakia for every day of the year, various canons and akathists, the order of preparation for 877 pp. \$35.
7. *Bogosluzhebnyaya Psaltir* (Service Psalter). Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y. 13361. The Psalms in full and divided into kathismata, the Scriptural Odes, select verses to various feasts and saints with their megalynaria, prayers for the departure of the soul. 506 pp. \$25.
8. *Molitvoslov* (Prayer Book). Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y., 1,3361. In either Slavonic script or Russian civil type. \$8.
9. Various canons, akathists, and services to saints or feast days. Ask for catalogue, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y. 13361.

10. *Sbornik Molitv.* (Collection of Prayers) Ed., Fr. V. Chuvashov, 1938. Available from Holy Trinity Monastery Bookstore. Prayers to the Savior, the Mother of God and various saints. To be read at the end of canons or akathists or at molebens. 268 pp. \$6.
11. *Troitsky Pravoslavnyy Russkij Kalendar.* Published annually by the Holy Trinity Monastery. Calendar, readings for every day of the year, the order of services (Typicon or Ustav) for Sundays and feast days. \$9.
12. *Pravilo k Bozhestvennomu Prichascheniju* (Rule for Divine Communion). Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y. 13361. 802 pp. \$16.
13. *Kelejnoe Pravilo* (Cell Rule). Publ., Convent of the Vladimir Mother of God, S.F. Available at Holy Trinity Monastery Bookstore.
14. *Chasoslov* (Horologion). YMCA Press, Paris. Also reprinted by Monastery Press, Montreal. The daily office.
15. *Akafistnik.* Akathists to various saints and feasts, in Russian civil type and new orthography. Inquire Holy Trinity Monastery Bookstore.
16. *Typikon siest Ustav* (The Typicon). The Order of Church Services, Paschalion, orders for various aspects of church life. 984 pp. Inquire Holy Trinity Monastery Bookstore.
17. *Nastol' naya Kniga* (Handbook). Fr. S. Bulgakov. In Russian. Contains the typicon, short lives of the saints for every day of the year, information on the church calendar, the Mysteries and on many aspects of church life.
18. *Nikolskij Ustav.* In Russian, similar to above.
19. *Sputnik Psalomschika* (Cantor's Companion). Abp. Arseny of Novgorod, 1916. Reprinted by Holy Trinity Monastery. Hymns for the entire church year. A music book in square notation, for one voice. Traditional Russian chant.
20. *Obikhod notnaga pjeinja.* Reprint of the 1909 Synodal Edition. Hymn book for one voice in square notation. Official Chant Book of the Russian Church. Contains music for Vespers, Matins and the Liturgy, in various chants; Znamenny, Kievan, "Greek" and "Bulgarian."

In English

1. *Service Book*, Isabel Hapgood. The first of its kind generally available in English. Various offices and services from the Horologion, Octoechos, Menaia, Triodion, Pentecostarion and Euchologion. 615 pp.
2. *Divine Prayers and Services*, Seraphim Nasser. Similar to the above, but with more material from the Octoechos, Triodion and Pentecostarion.
3. *THE PSALTER according to the Seventy*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston. Service Psalter, including the Scriptural Odes. Translated from the Septuagint, the official text of the Old Testament in the Orthodox Church.
4. *Prayer Book*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y. Morning and evening prayers, selections from Vespers and Matins, the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Sunday and feast-day troparia, and kontakia, selections from the Paschal service, canons to the Savior, the Mother of God and the Guardian Angel, akathists to the Savior and the Mother of God, prayers of preparation for Holy Communion and thanksgiving after Communion.
5. *The Festal Menaion*, Mother Mary and Archim. Kallistos Ware. Faber and Faber, paperback only. The services in full for the unmovable of the Twelve Great Feasts, also contains an outline and description of the order of church services. Very useful.
6. *The Lenten Triodion*, Mother Mazy and Archim. Kallistos Ware. Contains the services in full for the first week of Great Lent and for Holy Week, as well as for Sundays and other feasts of the Triodion Period.
7. *The Lenten Triodion*, Supplementary texts, Mother Mary and Archim. Kallistos Ware. Paperback only. Contains the services in full for the Lenten Triodion which, for reasons of space, were not included in the above.
8. *The Sunday Octoechos*, Mother Mary. Paperback. The services in full for Sundays in each of the eight tones.
9. *The Parakletike*, Weekday Offices, Tone One, Mother Mary. Paperback. The weekday offices; in full, but only for the first tone.
10. Individual services to various saints and feast days, by Mother Mary. Paperback.
11. *The Sunday Octoechos*, Prof. N. Orloff. AMS Press. A reprint of the earliest available translation of these services into English. Generally awkward but faithful translation.
12. *The General Menaion*, Orloff. AMS Press reprint. Stilted and archaic language, but the only translation available in English.
13. *The Ferial Menaion*, Orloff. AMS Press reprint. Services for the Twelve Great Feasts and the Feast of the Circumcision and St. Basil the Great. On translation, see above.
14. *The Unabbreviated Horologion*, Rassaphore-monk Laurence, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y., 13361. The fixed portion of the daily cycle of services in full, and the Divine Liturgy, without the usual abbreviations and with copious rubrics not ordinarily found in the Horologion. Looseleaf photocopy. Also available in pamphlet form are: a) The Divine Liturgy with the Third and Sixth Hours, Post-Communion Prayers, troparia, kontakia, and prokeimena for many feast days. b) The All-Night Vigil. Text of Vespers and Matins and the First Hour, and the Eleven Resurrection Gospels. c) The Typica, An Orthodox Worship Service for Laymen who are without Clergy. d) Great Compline and Evening Prayers. e) Small Compline and Evening Prayers. f) Music for the Divine Liturgy, and others. For a complete list write directly to Fr. Laurence, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y. 13361. (These translations are according to the usage of the Russian Church Abroad, but are not official texts.)
15. *An Abridged Typicon*, Fr. Feodor Kovalchuk. Out of print, but may be available in parish or university libraries. Useful

and interesting, but with rather peculiar terminology.

16. *The Service of the Small Supplicatory Canon to the Mother of God*, St. Nectarios Press, Seattle, WA.
17. *The Lamentations of Matins of Holy and Great Saturday*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA.
18. *Selected Byzantine Hymns*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery. In western musical notation. Selected hymns of Vespers, and from the Lenten Triodion and the Paschal Services.
19. *The Divine Liturgy*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery. Byzantine chant in western notation.
20. *The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y.
21. Various services to individual saints (St. Herman, St. Xenia), published by the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA 96076.
22. Various canons and akathists in back issues of *Orthodox Life*.

For more information on any of these, write: Holy Trinity Monastery Bookstore Jordanville, N.Y. 13361.

Endnotes

1. The order for reading canons and akathists in private is found in the back of the prayer book published by Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y.
2. Laymen are not forbidden to read services in the middle of the week, but it is rare that one could afford either a complete set of the Menaia (in Slavonic, \$750 or more) or the time needed to read the full cycle of services each day.

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