A modern Benedictine day

**From The Monastery of Christ in the Desert, Abiquiu, New Mexico, U.S.A.** [**https://christdesert.org**](https://christdesert.org)

**The time of the hours are in red**

**4:00 a.m.** – Vigils [or Mattins] (choral office in church) lasts about one hour.

**5:30 a.m.** – Lauds (in church) lasts about thirty minutes **followed by Mass**. *Breakfast for guests in the Guest Breakfast Room from 5:00 – 7:45 A.M.*

[Note that modern houses don’t seem to observe the first hour, Prime as a separate hour as they would have done in the pre-reformation period]

**8:45 a.m.** – Terce (in church) lasts about ten minutes.

**9:00 a.m.** – **Beginning of work period.** Work meeting for guests outside the Gift Shop. Work for All.

**12:40 p.m.** – **End of work period.**

**1:00 p.m.** – Sext (in church) lasts about ten minutes, *followed by main meal in the monastic refectory.*

**2:00 p.m.** – None (in church) lasts about ten minutes.

**5:20 p.m.** – Exposition and Eucharistic Adoration (in Church).

**5:50 p.m.** – Vespers (in church) lasts about thirty minutes.

**6:20 p.m.** – *Light meal until 6:50 P.M. in the monastic refectory.*

**7:30 p.m.** – Compline (in church) lasts about fifteen minutes, followed by nightly silence.

For examples of the content of Benedictine Hours visit [Universalis](https://universalis.com/index.htm) <https://universalis.com>

For an example of a more modern female house visit <https://stgertrudes.org/> also in the USA, in Idaho

## **The Monastic Day explained at The Monastery of Christ in the Desert**

**VIGILS**: The first gathering, VIGILS at 4:00 a.m., begins with the verse from Psalm 50, “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.” Lasting about an hour, Vigils consists of 12 psalms, a long Scripture lesson and a reading from the Church Fathers. On Sundays, the order is extended and lasts about an hour and a half.

After Vigils the monk may remain in church or return to the cell for a time of solitary prayer or sacred reading in the presence of God, the angels and saints. Breakfast for the monks and resident guests may also be taken at this time, or later in the morning, after Mass.

***Whenever he prays, the entire Church is invisibly present to the monk, who prolongs his choral prayer in solitary prayer. St. Jerome puts it thus: “Do you pray? You speak to the Beloved. Do you read? He speaks to you.”***

**LAUDS**: At 5:45 a.m., the community gathers again in church for the chanting of LAUDS. This is the prayer of the Church as light returns to earth, recounting the eternal light bestowed on the world by the Risen Christ. This Office lasts about half an hour.

**MASS (EUCHARIST)**: This is offered immediately following LAUDS and it is the heart of the monk’s day, when he receives the “Bread of Heaven,” Holy Communion — nourishment for the day ahead, and really for all eternity.

After Mass, about an hour is allotted for breakfast, personal time, further reading or relaxation. Again, resident guests may breakfast at this time as well.

**CHAPTER MEETING**: At 8:30 a.m., the brothers meet in the Chapter room for announcements and to firm up the daily work assignments, which may include cooking, laundry, correspondence with guests, gardening, computer work, maintenance, cleaning the guesthouse, porter, bookkeeping, administrative tasks, and crafts. Each day except Sunday, from 8:55 until 10:00 a.m., novices and postulants (the newest brothers not yet in vows) attend classes in Scripture, the Rule of St. Benedict, monastic history, chant and the vows, while those monks in vows begin their workday.

**TERCE**: One of the three “little hours” (called so because they are shorter in duration than the other offices) is chanted in choir at 8:45, then all who are not in classes take up their daily work assignments until about 12:40 p.m. Resident guests are invited to participate in all or part of the work period and receive their assignments from the workmaster following TERCE. Even in this work, the monks and guests strive to maintain an atmosphere of prayerful service in the presence of God.

***“The Brothers should have specified periods for manual labour as well as for prayerful reading … when they live by the labour of their hands … then they are really monks,” (RB 48).***

**SEXT**: After the second “little hour,” SEXT, at 1:00 p.m., the monks take their main meal in silence in the monastic refectory, listening to a short reading from the Bible and a reading from a book or article chosen for the purpose of “feeding the mind” while the body is being fed. These books and articles are usually on a monastic, historical, or spiritual topic. Resident guests join the monks for this midday meal. After washing dishes, the brothers can rest or read until the office of NONE.

**NONE**: The third “little hour,” is chanted by the community in church at 3:30 p.m. This office ends with the ancient Latin chant “Sub tuum praesidium,” sung to Our Lady for help in the material needs of the monastery.

After NONE, coffee or tea can be taken in silence in the refectory, and **then an hour is devoted to “Lectio Divina,” that is, sacred reading and reflecting on Scripture texts.** The postulants and novices meet together for this, while those monks in vows may pursue Lectio Divina in the cell or elsewhere.

**After Lectio there are some 20 minutes of free time followed by a common period of silent prayer and Eucharistic adoration for all in the church from 5:15 until 5:45p.m.**

**VESPERS**: At 5:50 p.m. VESPERS is chanted. This includes a half-hour of praying psalms, a hymn, the Magnificat, **and a prolonged prayer of intercessions for the needs and intentions of the entire Church.**

After Vespers there is time for the monks and resident guests to have an optional supper. Then at 7:10 a nightly Chapter Meeting when the monks gather to listen to a chapter or part of a chapter from the Rule of St. Benedict followed by a commentary by the abbot, and **offering those prayer intentions sent to the monks.**

**COMPLINE**: The final office of the day takes place at 7:30 p.m. when all gather in church for COMPLINE **that consists of a penitential rite,** three psalms, a hymn, and an antiphon sung to Our Lady that varies according to the liturgical season.

**To God is entrusted all the concerns and efforts of the day just passed. God’s angels are invited at Compline to “dwell in this house and keep it in peace,” and monks pray that God’s blessing be with them always.**

**The day officially ends at about 7:50 p.m. when the monks are free to retire for the night, perhaps to do some more reading, or study — but keeping in mind that the bell will ring to begin the day again at 3:40 a.m.!**

**GREAT SILENCE**: From after COMPLINE until after MASS the following day, the monks observe **the GREAT SILENCE when all unnecessary conversation ceases and during the hours of dark turn their thoughts to resting in God.** Resident guests are also asked to observe the GREAT SILENCE.

***“I will lie down in peace and sleep comes at once, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4, Office of Compline).***

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**SUNDAY SCHEDULE**: The schedule is similar on Sunday except for the following: LAUDS takes place at 6:00 a.m., then TERCE at 8:45 a.m. followed by MASS around 9:10 a.m. prior to which the monks have a brief CHAPTER MEETING and practice the music for MASS. Also on Sunday there is no work period, except for the cooks (cooking rotates among the monks) and the guestmaster, who may need to tend to the day visitors or resident guests. **On Sundays there is time for the monks to have recreation and hiking, or resting, as one chooses.**

**A RULE:** Generally speaking, whether in choir, at work, with the brethren or in solitude, the monk is supposed to be attentive to others, going with them to God. In a community setting for indeed the command of Christ is carried out: “Love one another as I have loved you.”(John 13:34).

All are to have concern for the common good and the spiritual progress of the monastery. ***“No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else.” (RB72).*** The abbot, as spiritual father, gathers regularly with the brothers for the decision-making that helps shape the community in the likeness of Christ, the One Lord, in whose image all are created.