

fact, we try to spend some time in silent prayer before starting the service, and we observe a few moments of silence following the service. [In fact, Rule 42 SILENCE AFTER COMPLINE of *The Rule of St. Benedict* states, “on leaving Compline, no one will be permitted to speak further.”] For most of us in this hectic world silence is uncomfortable, awkward, or at least not very common place. A time of silence, a time of peace, is needed for us to become centered on God, to be come focused.

Cycles of night and day have been long upon the earth, and they will long continue. As these cycles pass us swiftly by, we must learn to step out of the endless cycle, into the eternal dimension of time which leads to — “*the now that does not pass away.*” For the Compline Choir, this happens during the service, as we stand in silence, as we chant, as we are illuminated by the Word in the midst of a dark world.

TS Eliot concludes the *Choruses from ‘The Rock’* as follows:

Therefore we thank Thee for our little light, that is dappled with shadow.

We thank Thee who hast moved us to building, to finding, to forming at the ends of our fingers and beams of our eyes.

And when we have built an altar to the Invisible Light, we may set thereon the little lights for which our bodily vision is made.

And we thank Thee that darkness reminds us of light.

O Light Invisible, we give Thee thanks for Thy great glory.

During our Final Preces we cry out the final verse from Psalm 4,

“We will lay us down in peace and take our rest. For it is Thou, Lord only, that makes us dwell in safety.”

We then return — reluctantly — from the darkness, illuminated by the Light Invisible, to the earthly realm that engulfs us.

R.R. Sinden, *Compline Choir*



Some of the thoughts and ideas herein were drawn from the writings of David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B., in particular three books - *The Music of Silence; Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer; and A Listening Heart.*

Photos: Mission San José, San Antonio, TX; by RRS

Compline

A Time of Peace – To Grow in Faith



For more than 1500 years monks have praised and worshiped God eight times a day, every day, through short services, where they chant psalms, hymns, and songs (*Opus Dei*, the work of God, as it is called). This tradition continues today in monasteries all over the world.

Compline is the last of the eight daily monastic offices of worship, which include Vigils (or Matins), Lauds, Prime, Terse, Sext, None, Vespers, and finally Compline. Compline means *complete*. It signals the completion of the day. As the last office, Compline is offered as a final act before laying down for the rest and regeneration that comes from sleep. Compline was originally held in the cloister and was limited in attendance to the monks themselves. Basically, Compline was the prayer monks said before going to bed.

Compline is a time to reflect — a time to ask forgiveness for our failures throughout the day. In Compline, we also ask protection through the dark night that is to come — and for our future — a future yet unknown. It is a time to evaluate our fears and to examine our level of trust in God. To be at peace we need to trust in God. If we fail to trust, we will never be at peace. ‘Faith in God’ is the virtue we strive to develop during Compline. With faith, Compline can bathe us, for the moment, in the eternal peace, joy, and comfort that will come with everlasting life with God. Compline is — *a time of peace to grow in faith.*

About the Compline Service . . .

Compline, as a monastic office, traditionally consists of chanted Psalms, short passages of scripture (chapters), a canticle (a liturgical song, e.g. Nunc Dimittis), an office hymn, and a lityany, bringing together our thoughts (collects) and prayers. The service at St. Andrew's adds an introit and an anthem.

The bell calls the brothers to prayer.

“Grant us a quiet night and a perfect end,” we begin. This is as much a call to a peaceful end to our day, as it is a call to a peaceful and perfect end to our lives. The only perfect end to our earthy lives is that beginning a new life for eternity in that place Christ has gone to prepare for us. Everlasting life with God in heaven should be the ultimate goal of our lives. The ultimate goal for the end of each day of our lives should be a sense of peace knowing that we have made progress toward this ultimate goal. Compline provides time to reflect on this.

We then recite I Peter 5: 8-9a, “Be watchful, be sober, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him firm in your faith.” What powerful words of wisdom!

Vigils, the Night Service, focuses on the one true *Light* that shines in the darkness to rescue us from the dark hour of Vigils. During Compline, as we enter our daily period of prolonged darkness, we ask for God's protection through the night. In ancient times, the devil was believed to roam around at night, in the darkness. Night was a fearful time, a time of the unknown. People are generally still afraid of the dark, afraid of the unknown. We live in communities

that light up the darkness of night so that we can know what is out there, so we can be not so afraid. Compline can be a time to address the state of our spiritual darkness, our spiritual unknown. It is a time to address our relationship with God, a time to measure our level of trust in him. Compline is a time to ask God to protect us, “under the shadow of your wing.”

Psalms, 4, 91, and 134, are traditionally chanted at Compline, as the Rule of St. Benedict tells us. These are wonderful Psalms, comforting Psalms that can support us through the dark night as well as through dark periods of our lives. The Cantor leads us in chanting the psalms.

From Psalm 91 (NIV):

¹He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, abides under the shadow of the almighty.

²He shall say to the Lord,

“You are my refuge and my stronghold, my God in him will I trust.

³He shall deliver you from the snare of the hunter and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴He shall cover you with his pinions,

and you shall find refuge under his wings, his faithfulness shall be a shield and buckler.

⁵You shall not be afraid of any terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day.

⁶Of the plague that stalks in the darkness,

nor of the sickness that lays waste at midday.

⁹Because you have made the Lord your refuge, and the most high your habitation.

¹⁰There shall no evil happen to you,

neither any plague come near your dwelling.

¹¹For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.

¹²They shall bear you in their hands,

lest you dash your foot against a stone.

¹⁴Because he is bound to me in love, therefore will I deliver him;

I will protect him because he knows my name.

¹⁵He shall call upon me and I will answer him; I am with him in trouble;

I will rescue him and bring him to honor.

¹⁶With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.

After the Officiant reads a Chapter, we sing an Office Hymn. One reason Compline is such a special hour is the wealth of beautiful hymns appropriate for that hour. “To You Before the Close of Day,” from the 6th century, is a consummate Compline hymn.

1. To you before the close of day,

Creator of the world we pray that in your constant clemency

our guard and keeper you would be.

2. Save us from troubled restless sleep,

from all ill dreams your children keep;

so calm our minds that fears may cease and rested bodies wake in peace.

3. A healthy life we ask of you,

the fire of love in us renew,

and when the dawn new light will bring

your praise and glory we shall sing.

4. Almighty Father hear our cry

through Jesus Christ, our Lord most high,

whom with the Spirit we adore

for ever, and for evermore.

After chanting the Apostles Creed and the Lord's prayer we chant a ‘Versicles and Responses’ and then we offer our collects and prayers. We then chant the Nunc Dimittis (The Song of Simeon). Here we reaffirm that our eyes have seen the Light and that the knowledge of

this will carry us into the next day. If our faith is strong enough, if our faith is real enough, our faith will carry us into the next dimension of time: out of the present, finite dimension of our lives, and into the eternal dimension to take our place at the table prepared for us.

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch in Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.

1. Lord, you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised;

2. For these eyes have seen the Savior, whom you prepared for all the world to see;

3. A light to enlighten the nations,

and the glory of your people Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,

and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch in Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.

“That awake we may watch in Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.” For the Compline

Choir, Compline brings a sense of peace. It has become the spiritual highlight of the week for

many Compliners and Compline devotees. It is a time to reconnect with the Spirit, to re-focus on

God and our relationship with him. Time stands still when we are in touch with the Spirit during

the service. The 25-30 minutes seems more like

5-10 minutes. We want the spirit of the service, the peace that it brings, to linger in our hearts.

Between the chants and prayers we stand in silence before God. Silence is a time to focus on the prayer, or the psalm or hymn to come. If