

SYNAXARIA OF THE TRIODION

by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos

THURSDAY of the GREAT CANON

On the same day, the Thursday of the Fifth Week of the Fast, according to ancient Tradition, we chant the service of the Great and compunctious Canon.

Verses

Grant ways of compunction, O Jesus,
To those who chant unto Thee the Great Canon.

Synaxarion

This Canon, which is truly the greatest of all Canons, was most excellently and skillfully composed by our Father among the Saints, Andrew, Archbishop of Crete, who is also called the Jerusalemite, and who hailed from Damascus. In the fourteenth year of his life, having been entrusted to a grammar school and having acquired a general education, he went to Jerusalem, where he entered the monastic life. Living a holy and God-loving life, in silence and tranquillity, he bequeathed a whole range of soul-profitting writings to the Church of God, including orations and canons, showing particular adroitness in producing Festal Canons. Along with many others, he composed the present Great Canon, which is replete with boundless compunction. For, bringing together the entire history of the Old and New Testaments, he created this poem, starting from Adam and going all the way up to the Ascension of Christ and the preaching of the Apostles. Through it, he exhorts every soul to emulate and imitate, as far it is able, all of the good deeds in the stories and to avoid all of the evil doings, and always to have recourse to God through repentance, tears, and confession, and whatever else is well-pleasing to Him. This Canon has such breadth and harmony that it is capable of softening the hardest soul and arousing to good deeds, as long as it is chanted with a contrite heart and with the attention that it deserves. He produced it after Saint Sophronios, the great Patriarch of Jerusalem, had written the life of Saint Mary of Egypt; for this life presents us with boundless compunction and affords great consolation to those who have fallen and those who sin, provided only they desire to desist from evil-doing.

These works were appointed to be chanted and read on the present day for the following reason: since the Great Fast is drawing to a close, in order that people should not become lazy and negligent in spiritual struggles, completely refraining from chastity in all matters, the great Andrew, like a trainer, relating the virtues of great men and, conversely, the degeneracy of the wicked, through the stories that appear in the Great Canon, makes us labor more valiantly, one might say, and reach forth courageously to those things which lie before. The Divine Sophronios, through his marvellous account, in turn makes us chaste and arouses us Godwards, urging us not to become downcast or fall into despair, if we have succumbed to certain sins. For the narrative concerning Saint Mary of Egypt shows the extent of God's loving-kindness and compassion for those who choose wholeheartedly to turn away from their former sins. Saint Andrew's Canon is called "Great," one might perhaps say, on account of its many sublime ideas and themes; for its composer, who compiled them superbly, was endowed with poetic genius. It is also called "Great," because, while the other Canons contain around thirty *Troparia* and a few additional ones, this one amounts to two hundred and fifty, each of them dripping with ineffable delight. Appropriately and fittingly, therefore, was this Great Canon, which has the power to incite great compunction, appointed to be read in the Great Fast. The same Father Andrew was the first to convey this excellent and greatest of Canons, together with the life of Saint Mary, to Constantinople, when he was sent by Patriarch Theodore of Jerusalem to assist the Sixth Œcumenical Synod; for at that time, while still a monk, he contended valiantly against the Monothelites and was numbered among the clergy of the Church of Constantinople; he then became a Deacon and head of an orphanage in this city, and, shortly thereafter, Archbishop of Crete. Later on, having set out for his diocese and reached the city of Hierissos, on Mitylene, he departed to the Lord.

By the intercessions of Saint Andrew, O God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen.

