

Dear Friends,

We have reached the point in the Lenten journey we in the normal course of events we would be celebrating the service of the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete. Strictly speaking the service, which is Matins, belongs to Thursday morning, and I shall celebrate it at home then, but in our community, as in many others, it is usually served on Wednesday evening by anticipation, in order to allow more people to attend.

The Great Canon is a long meditation on the Scriptures, setting before us references to many stories in order that, as St Andrew says, we may “imitate the holy acts of the righteous and flee from the sins of the wicked.” As Fr Nephon Tsimalis reminded those of us who were able to “attend” his video lecture on repentance last night, the Biblical word for “sin” (*amartia*) means not the breaking of a rule but a failure to hit the target. St Andrew’s work is designed to encourage each of us to read the Biblical narratives through spiritual lenses and to ask ourselves, “How have I, in the things that I have done which I should not have done, and in the things that I have not done which I ought to have done, missed being my true self or fallen away from being the person I was made to be?” In other words, it is a great prayer of repentance.

How can we make the call of this service our own this Lent? Obviously for many people saying the whole service is out of the question. Even in the truncated form in which we usually say it in Church in our community the service lasts well over 2 hours, and it is not realistic to expect families and those who are working from home to put aside that much time to devote to this exercise. But we can still work to foster an image of repentance. One possibility would be to add one section (“Ode”) of the Canon to our morning or evening prayers. Another would be to take one section, or even part of a section, and read and meditate on the Scriptural material to which it refers. (You can find the Great Canon at https://www.ponomar.net/data/lenten_triodion.pdf, starting at page 378 of the book, page 148 of the pdf. The Scripture references in the footnotes refer us to the passages being contemplated.) Another possibility, since the Great Canon includes many references to the story of St Mary of Egypt (whose day it is today, and whose memory will be celebrated on Sunday), would be to read her life and meditate on her example, and what it tells us about repentance. (The [long] text of the life that is read in church is here: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/maryegypt.asp>; but a shorter version can be found here: <https://www.goarch.org/sunday-stmaryofegypt> [under “Life of the Saint”]). Finally, even if we do not have time for any of these options, we could include within our daily prayers one or two of the Psalms of repentance. The best know of these is Psalm 51 in the Hebrew numbering that is found in most English Bibles: “Have mercy on me, O God...”., but Psalms 6, 130 and 143 are also traditional short prayers of penitence. (In the Greek numbering of the Psalms these will be Psalms 50, 6, 129, and 142.)

However we choose to mark it let us look for the opportunities that God sends us in this season of repentance to set out once more on our journey to become who we are created to be. And let us never lose sight of his love and forgiveness.

With my love to you all,

Fr Ian