

Light of Orthodoxy, support and teacher of the Church; beautiful hierarch, fighter, and invincible champion of theologians; wise Andrew, pride of Crete, preacher of Grace, intercede for the salvation of our souls.

Apolytikion Tone VIII

Saint Andrew of Crete

Who is Saint Andrew of Crete?

St Andrew was born in the city of Damascus into a pious Christian family. Up until seven years of age, he was mute. However, after communing the Holy Mysteries of Christ, he found the gift of speech and began to speak. From that time forward, the young boy began earnestly to study Holy Scripture and the discipline of theology. At age 14, he went to Jerusalem where he became a monk in the monastery of St Sava the Sanctified.

He led a strict and chaste life, was meek and abstinent, and was admired by all for his virtue and reasoning of mind. Because of that, he was appointed secretary for the Patriarchate and, in the year 680, he was chosen to represent Jerusalem at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople. Here, the saint relied on his profound knowledge of Orthodox doctrine to contend against heretical teachings. Shortly after the Council, St Andrew was summoned back to Constantinople and was appointed archdeacon at the church of Hagia Sophia.

How did he contribute to the services of the Orthodox Church?

During the reign of the emperor Justinian II (685-695), St Andrew was ordained bishop on the island of Crete. In his new position, he shone as a true luminary of the Church, a great Hierarch -- a theologian, teacher and hymnographer.

St. Andrew was a prolific hymn-writer, and he originated a new liturgical form -- the Canon. Used in many Orthodox services, a canon is a highly structured poetic hymn that pulls from the Old and New Testaments to express a specific theme, like repentance or honor for a specific saint.

Of the canons composed by St Andrew, the best known is the Great Penitential Canon, which is read each year during Great Lent. The Canon is broken into four parts and each portion read during the first four evenings of the First Week of Great Lent. In the First Week of Lent at the service of Compline it is read in portions (thus called "methymony" [translation note: from the usage in the service of Compline of the "For God is with us", or in Greek "Meth' imon O

Theos”, from which derives “methymony”], But it is read again, in its entirety, on Thursday of the Fifth Week of Great Lent.

What other contributions St Andrew has made?

St Andrew was known for his many praises of the All-Pure Virgin Mary. To him, likewise, are ascribed the Canon for the feast of the Nativity of Christ; three odes for the Compline of Palm Sunday; verses for the feast of the Meeting of the Lord, and many other church hymns. Many edifying sermons of St Andrew have also been preserved.

While church historians are not clear on the exact date of his (one suggests the year 712, while others say 726), he died on the island of Mytilene, while returning to Crete from Constantinople, where he had been on church business. His relics were later transferred to Constantinople. In the year 1350, the pious Russian pilgrim Stephen Novgorodets saw the relics at the Constantinople monastery named for St Andrew of Crete.

Rejoice, divine flute of the Church, All-blessed Andrew, Treasury of the Spirit. Rejoice, Shepard of Cretans who discourses about God and is protectors and divine helper.
Megalynarion

The Great Canon Summary

The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is perhaps the greatest poetic work of a repentant soul since the King and Prophet David. In this massive undertaking, St. Andrew explores the inner depths of his soul to uncover every possible sin or trespass that he has committed, and he does this by warning his soul of the perils of a wicked, unrepentant life. The main source of these warnings is the entirety of scripture from the characters and events that took place in the book of Genesis all the way through to the life of Christ in the Gospels. As he writes in the 8th ode:

"All the names of the Old Testament have I set before you, my soul, as an example. Imitate the holy acts of the righteous and flee from the sin of the wicked."

This canon is so thorough that it is in itself a study of scripture in what it means for us as Christians to repent. St. Andrew does not mince words when he warns us that our sins can truly bring ruin to our souls. Each time a faithful person sins, he or she is spiritually bringing death upon their souls. This is evident especially in the beginning of the canon where he brings up the example of Cain and Abel. He likens Cain to sins that murder the soul. Abel,

on the other hand, brings an offering of life to God who accepts it just as He accepts the repentant soul and gives it life in return.

There are so many other examples to which he likens repentance. Jacob and the ladder, Joseph in Egypt, Saul and his pride, David and his repentance, Solomon, Elijah, Jonah and the Ninevites, David and the Youths. Moses takes a prominent spot in the 6th ode where sins are likened to the waves that are engulfing the soul like they did Pharaoh and his chariot. But the most important scriptural reference comes at the end where all of history culminates in the person of Jesus Christ. All of these sins that we as humanity have committed from the very beginning are placed on the Holy Cross with Christ. And through this single act all of our human depravity and sinfulness is overcome by the Son of God. To finish, St. Andrew asks that when our Lord returns in His glory that he please have mercy on all of us so that we might have true life with Him, who is the source of light.

This beautiful canon is to be said by all of us as fervently as we can, so that we can find joy and solace by our turning to the Lord in repentance. It is the anthem of those who have sinned and who, above everything else, desperately want to cling to the Lord God and have Him dwell and remain in them forever. May he intercede for us all so that we can cultivate a spirit of repentance as we approach the Holy Week and the Glorious Resurrection.