

THE FIRST WEEK OF GREAT LENT

Services and prayers for the first week of Great Lent include the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, the Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, and an Akathist.

GREAT CANON OF ST. ANDREW OF CRETE - This is also known as the Canon of Repentance. It contains many biblical examples of sin and repentance, to remind us to examine our conscience and ask God to forgive our sins. It is an evening service.

LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS - At St. Michael's this Liturgy is held on Wednesdays of Great Lent, with Communion that was prepared the Sunday before.

AKATHIST - On the Fridays before Holy Week, we remember Mary (the Theotokos) and the Saints, and we ask them to pray for us.

PRAYER OF ST. EPHREM

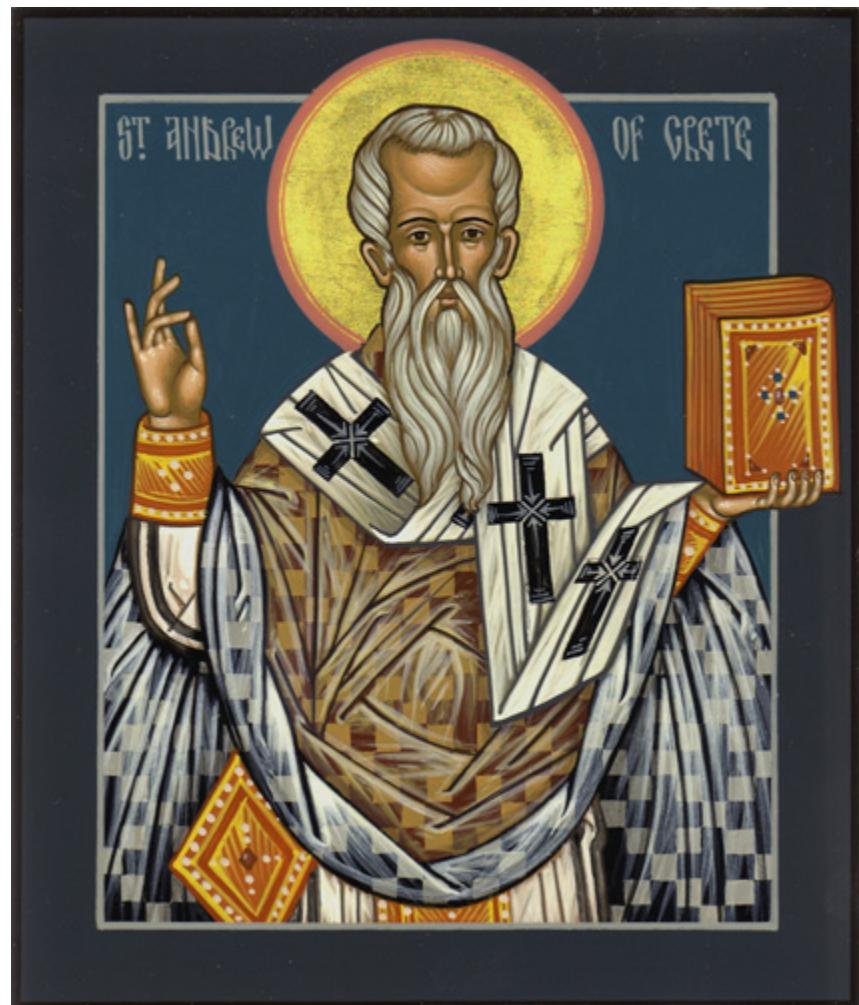
O Lord and Master of my life,
Grant not unto me a spirit of idleness,
of discouragement, of lust for power, and of idle talk.
(BOW)

But bestow upon me, Your servant,
the spirit of chastity, meekness, patience, and love.
(BOW)

Yea, O Lord and King,
grant that I may see my own faults
and not the faults of others,
for blessed are you unto ages of ages. Amen.
(BOW)

Forgiveness Sunday

Preparation to enter Great Lent



A Helper and a Protector has become salvation to me.
This is my God, Whom I will glorify.
God of my fathers

I will exalt Him for in glory was He glorified.
Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

(from the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete)

FORGIVENESS

(Studying the Gospel of Matthew 6:14-21)

1. Asking for Forgiveness

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

The word “trespasses” means offenses, sins that we do that hurt other people. Jesus Christ is speaking here. He explains the part of the Lord’s Prayer that says, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” He makes the important point that God forgives us to the same degree that we follow the commandment to forgive others.

Great Lent is a time for repentance and forgiveness. We begin this season with **Forgiveness Sunday Vespers** when we ask and receive forgiveness from everyone.

Some people wonder why we should ask everyone to forgive us, especially to ask someone if we feel that we haven’t done anything to hurt or offend them.

The answer is that **whatever sins we do in life have meaning beyond what we might be aware of**, and what affects one person might go beyond that person to affect another in some way.

For example, if we were thoughtless about others’ feelings and said or did something that hurt someone, that person might become upset and irritable and then say or do something that hurts another person’s feelings. And it could affect people whom we don’t even know. So, whatever we do might go way beyond what we are aware of.

On Forgiveness Sunday, the choir sings a Kontakion (hymn) that reminds us to ask forgiveness from God. In our heart, we pray this too.

Kontakion — Tone 6

Master, Teacher of wisdom, Bestower of virtue,
You teach the thoughtless and protect the poor:
Strengthen and enlighten my heart.
Word of the Father, let me not restrain my mouth from crying to you:
Have mercy on me, a sinner, O merciful Lord!

2. Fasting

"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

This Scripture recalls the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. Remember that the Pharisee did good things but he wanted other people to admire him for it.

Here, Christ reminds us again that whatever we do in our prayer life should be done with the **goal of becoming closer to God, not to impress other people**.

How each family and each person keeps the Fast is, therefore, an individual matter between the person and God.

3. Spiritual Health

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

This Scripture reminds us that getting the things that we want should not be the most important goal in our lives. We all need certain things in order to live. But **more important than things is to be spiritually healthy**. The Orthodox Church teaches that “sin” is a spiritual sickness. Its cure comes from paying attention to God’s commandments, asking God to forgive us when we do wrong, and doing our best to improve our behavior.

Today is also **“Cheese Fare Sunday.”** This refers to the Orthodox tradition to say “fare-well” (goodbye) to eating milk products until Pascha. Great Lent begins the next day.