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## Why we sing the Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete



My soul, my soul arise. Why are you sleeping? The end draws nigh and soon you will be troubled. Take heed, then, that Christ your God may spare you. For he is everywhere present and fills all things.

In parishes, the Great Canon is sung independently of Matins, on the evening of Wednesday in the fifth week of Lent. We begin by reading Small Compline and immediately thereafter start to sing the Great Canon with each verse followed by the refrain 'Have mercy on me, Lord, have mercy on me'.

The Great Canon was composed by Saint Andrew of the Jerusalem brotherhood, Archbishop of Crete, and is one of the most wonderful hymns of our Church, a hymn of profound contrition and heart-rending repentance. It is sung in parts on the first four days of Lent and completely on the Thursday of fifth week.

In composing the Great Canon, Saint Andrew of Crete aimed to bring people to an

awareness of their sinfulness and to lead them to God through repentance. The task and aim of the Great Canon is to uncover sin and so bring us to repentance. This revelation is not accomplished through definitions and enumerations, but by a long look at Biblical history, which is, itself, the history of sin, repentance and forgiveness.

We know that sin is, first and foremost, denial of the fact that life is an offering or sacrifice to God. In other words, a denial that life has a divine orientation and that sin, therefore, is rooted in a deviation from love, from the final goal of life.

All Christians, who are aware of the burden of sin, understand the tragic consequences of our apostasy from our All-Good God. They repent and lament bitterly but this is a lamentation that saves, a lamentation that brings us, as human beings, back close to God.

In the period of contrition that is Great Lent, the Great Canon offers a poignant experience. It is sung by all the faithful as an earth-shattering alarm, as an aversion to the soul which is sleeping and slothful.

Source: [Pemptousia.com](http://Pemptousia.com)

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