

The Who's Who of The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete

by Protodeacon James Hughes

Throughout the world, devout Orthodox Christians begin the period of Great Lent by listening to the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete. The canon is read during the first four evenings of Great Lent, Monday through Thursday. In this canon, St. Andrew, (reposed in first half of 8th century) who was the Archbishop of Crete, strives to bring us into a spirit of repentance by citing the actions of many men and women in the Old Testament. The purpose of this talk is to help us get the spiritual benefit offered by the canon.

However, before we start the main part of this talk, we need to set the stage; we need say a few things which will give us a context, a perspective, for what we are about to hear. This context is necessary because St. Andrew is rather “hard-hitting” and does not “pull any punches” in his attempt to expose us to ourselves.

The idea of sin is not a popular one in today’s mentality. People complain about an emphasis on sin because it seems too negative and does not make us “feel good about ourselves”, and hurts our “self-esteem”, a highly respected sentiment these days. With this perspective, the Canon could easily be seen as negative, unloving, and severe, especially to those who are new to Orthodoxy.

The first thing that needs to be understood - and it takes a while - is that Orthodoxy takes very seriously the fact that we have been created in the image and likeness of God. The Orthodox Church is not satisfied with us being simply “good.” Orthodoxy wants the very best for us. The Church wants each of us to truly be who and what we were created to be, that is, the likeness of God. That is a tall order. The bar is very high. God loves us far too much to lower the bar, simply to make us feel “comfortable.”

The second thing we must gradually come to understand is that what is called “the fall of man” is real. We must come to realize that this fall from our original state is not just an historical reality, but that it is a day-to-day reality. The effects of the fall of man are with us as much as effects of gravity are with us. We are always affected by gravity and we are always dealing with our fallen nature.

If we neglect to account for gravity in our actions, we physically fall. The result of negligence is immediate and obvious. However, if we neglect to account for our fallen nature, the results are as immediate, but they are not always so obvious, as they are with gravity.

Many of the muscles of our body are constantly fighting against gravity in order to keep us upright. We learn how to use these muscles gradually during the first years of our

life, through trial and error, through falling many times. We fall, we see that we have fallen, and we get up again. Watch a one year old child to see this.

A similar process happens in the spiritual life in our struggle against our fallen nature, that is, in our struggle to stand tall as sons of God. However, we are generally not so aware of the spiritual falls we take. Therefore, we often think that we are standing when, actually, we are lying flat on our face.

One of the purposes of St. Andrew's Canon is to help us to examine ourselves, to help us see that, in many ways, we are not standing as tall as we might think. The Canon is indeed hard-hitting, but good medicine is not always tasty. It is far better to endure the pain of reproach for a moment than to live a life of unreality.

One more note before we start. We mentioned muscles a moment ago. Those attending, rather, those actually *participating* in St. Andrew's Canon will be using their muscles quite a bit. If you do not feel it during the Canon, you will surely feel it the next morning.

St. Andrew's Canon is a beautiful example of how Orthodox liturgical life is designed to engage the three powers of our soul. These powers are called various names by the Fathers of the Church, but for now we will refer to them as the power of will, the power of feeling, or heart, and the power of thinking mind, or mental capabilities. Describing these powers is a whole different subject, so for now we will simply say that, on the physical level, the power of will involves our muscles, the power of feeling involves our ability to have non-rational responses to experiences, i.e. feelings, and the power of thinking includes such things as knowledge and logic.

In the Canon, as in all of Orthodox liturgical life, the power of will is engaged through the muscles of the body. The many bows we make during the Canon are part of the design to bring forth some noble response from our heart. We will be making many, many bows during the reading of the Canon. The purpose of these bows is not to make us physically fit but rather to help bring our heart to a state of repentance. The actions of Old Testament characters engage the power of thinking and are brought to our attention for the same purpose - to bring us to repentance. The talk tonight involves mainly the power of thinking, that is, to help us know what St. Andrew is talking about with all his Old Testament references.

As we approach Great Lent, the time given to us specifically for repentance, the Church gives us a whole host of images to help us. St. John of Kronstadt teaches that

Imagery or symbols are a necessity of human nature in our presently spiritually sensual condition; they explain [by the vision] many things belonging to the spiritual world which we could not know without images and symbols.

We need pictures to help us think, to help us digest and understand the truths given to us. What St. Andrew of Crete does in the Great Canon is to bring to remembrance many characters of the Old Testament and a few from the New Testament, using them as examples of either virtue or vice.

In earlier times, even though they may not have been able to read, people knew the scriptures much more than modern Orthodox do. Mention a name like Korah, Dathan, Hophni or Phinehas and many people would be able to tell you all about them. When they heard these names in St. Andrew's canon, they had the opportunity to be struck in the heart and brought to repentance. Unfortunately we are not that scripturally literate so the names can just fly by and not mean anything to us. Being ignorant, we could be virtually untouched by the Canon. The reason for this talk is to at least start us on the way to knowing the references used by St. Andrew.

Once we know who these people are, we can take the next step, which is to take the Canon personally. We must be careful not to listen to the Canon, then judge the people mentioned. Their sins and failings are our sins and failings.

The order in which St. Andrew mentions people is essentially chronological, that is, according to the history of the world. We will not be able to cover all the characters presented by St. Andrew, but we will mention as many as we can. The first period of time is from

The Creation through the Flood

Adam and Eve

The first people mentioned are, understandably, Adam and Eve. In Canticle One we read,

I have rivaled in transgression Adam the first-formed man, and I have found myself stripped naked of God, of the eternal kingdom and its joy, because of my sins.

And

Instead of the visible Eve, I have the Eve of the mind: the passionate thought in my flesh, showing me what seems sweet; yet whenever I taste from it, I find it bitter.

Adam and Eve, of course, do not need any introduction. St. Andrew, through mentioning Adam and Eve tells us of the results of sin (separation from eternal life) and the cause of sin (turning from God in our thinking). It is interesting that St. Andrew refers to Eve

as the mind. On March 16\29, which always is within the Lenten period, in the *For Consideration* section of the Prologue from Ochrid, there is a quote from St. Hesychius which reads, "If you make yourself fulfill [God's commandments] in thought, you will rarely find it necessary to toil over the fulfilling of them in action." In a prayer read at Midnight office on Sunday morning, there is a phrase which reads something like, "I have become a slave to pleasure through slothfulness of mind".

You may even have seen the bumper sticker which reads, "Don't believe everything you think". If we believe everything we think, and, in our laziness, do not weigh our thoughts against the commandments of Christ, we become enslaved. By being aware of our thoughts, we can come to know what lies in our heart. We may not like what we come to know, but such is the spiritual life.

The rest of the Old Testament figures mentioned in the canon could be seen as examples of the various ways in which we sin against God, in thought word, and deed.

Cain

Next mentioned is Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve.

By my own free choice I have incurred the guilt of Cain's murder. I have killed my conscience, bringing the flesh to life and making war upon the soul by my wicked actions.

Cain was half-hearted in his devotions and sacrifice toward God. He didn't give his best. He gave lip service, empty words, to God; he did not give his heart. He knew that the sacrifice he was making was only an outward show, but "killed" his conscience by not listening to it. However, God was not mocked; He saw the shallowness of Cain's efforts and therefore did not accept the sacrifice and did not reward Cain.

Abel

Of course, Cain is mentioned in contrast to his brother Abel, who offered to God an unblemished lamb. St. Andrew writes

O Jesus, I have not been like Abel in his righteousness. Never have I offered Thee acceptable gifts or godly actions, a pure sacrifice or a life unblemished.

Some interpreters of the story of Cain and Abel see Cain's sin as not offering the correct kind of sacrifice; he offered the fruits of his garden, not a lamb as did Abel. This is

missing the point. God, of course, wants our hearts. Our responsibility is to give our best in all we do.

Cain's half-heartedness led to envy which led to murder. Envy comes when we are ungrateful and have not given with a sincere and humble heart. When we feel envious, it is a sign that we got caught in our ingratitude and we don't like it. We got caught trying to give our second best but still expecting to receive the best reward. We kill our conscience which tries to tell us that our disappointment is our own fault. Of course, our disappointment, our dissatisfaction, must be someone's fault, but rather than judging ourselves, we turn on our brother.

We probably do not murder outwardly as did Cain, but we all know the judgements and anger that accompany envy. Our Lord tells us in the sermon on the mount that, "Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time 'Thou shalt not kill'... But I say unto you "Whosoever shall be angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgement."

Lamech (descendent of Cain)

In Canticle two, we hear of Lamech. There are a few Lamechs in the Old Testament. This one was a descendant of Cain. Cain had a son named Enoch, and, according to Genesis 4:17, built a city and named it after his son. The name Enoch mean "dedicated." Remember that for later.

Enoch had a son named Irad, Irad had a son named Mehujael. Mehujael had a son named Methusael (not to be confused with Methuselah). Finally, Methusael had a son named Lamech.

Lamech's sin was, like Cain, murder. Whereas Cain killed one person, Lamech kills two people - an older man and a young man. The canon reads

To whom shall I liken thee, O soul of many sins? Alas! to Cain and to Lamech. For thou hast stoned thy body to death with thine evil deeds, and killed thy mind with thy disordered longings.

Although it may be sweet at first, sin is essentially self-destructive. Through sin, a man ends up destroying his own body and soul, (the man) and his mind (the young man).

St. Andrew then mentions four righteous men.

Call to mind, my soul, all who lived before the Law. Thou hast not been like Seth, or followed Enos or Enoch, who was translated to heaven, or Noah; but thou art found destitute, without a share in the life of the righteous.

Seth was a son of Adam and Eve born after Abel had been murdered and Cain had been cast away. Seth had a son named Enos. The last verse of the fourth chapter of Genesis reads.

And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.

Enos had a son named Cainan. Cainan had a son named Mahalaleel. Mahalaleel had a son named Jared, who, in turn, had a son named Enoch. This second Enoch did not die as men normally do. When he was three hundred sixty-five years old, he was "translated."

The exact meaning of "translated" is unclear, but apparently Enoch was true to the meaning of his name "dedicated". The scriptures say that . . . "Enoch walked with God: and he was not, for God took him." (Genesis 5:24). Enoch had a very famous son, the oldest recorded person in history, namely, Methuselah.

We have now been introduced to two people named Enoch. The first Enoch was Cain's son. He was dedicated to this world, symbolized by his connection to a worldly city. The second Enoch was the one mentioned by St. Andrew, who was dedicated to God and was found worthy to enter the heavenly city.

Noah

The fourth righteous man mentioned in canticle two is Noah. We all know Noah. He was a righteous man in the midst of a very unrighteous society. Only Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives survived the Great Flood.

Lot

Canticle three begins with a reference to Lot, Abraham's nephew and the son of Abraham's brother, Haran. Haran had died and Abraham was looking after Lot, his nephew.

The reference to Lot in the canon is

O my soul, flee like Lot to the mountains, and take refuge in Zoar before it is too late. Flee from the flames, my soul, flee from the burning heat of Sodom, flee from the destruction by the fire of God.

This verse of the canon is in reference to the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Three angels were sent by God to destroy these cities for their extreme wickedness. However before destroying the cities, angels first went to visit Abraham who was

living on the Plain of Mamre, not too far from Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham offered them wonderful hospitality. It was during this visit that the angels told Abraham and Sarah (99 and 89 years old at the time) that Sarah would bear a son who would be called Isaac. This incident is the inspiration behind the icon we know of as The Hospitality of Abraham.

When the angels told Abraham that they were on their way to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham realized that his nephew lived there and asked the angels if they would destroy the cities if they found fifty good people there. They said, "No." Abraham kept questioning the angels, lowering the number of righteous people required to warrant a reprieve. The angels finally agreed that if ten righteous people were in the cities they would not destroy them.

As it turned out, only four good people were found - Lot and his wife and two daughters. The angels told them to flee to the mountains and not turn back. This is when Lot's wife disobeyed and turned back. She turned into a pillar of salt. It is very possible that the site of Sodom and Gomorrah is now covered by the Dead Sea.

Toward the end of Canticle three there are more references to Lot. We are urged

Do not look back, my soul, and so be turned into a pillar of salt. Fear the example of the people of Sodom, and take refuge in Zoar. Flee, my soul, like, Lot, from the burning of sin; flee from Sodom and Gomorrah; flee from the flame of every brutish desire.

Lot escaped destruction because he fled from temptation and did not look back. Lot's wife, however, yielded to her attraction to Sodom. She still wanted what was there. So often we entertain sinful thoughts, thinking we can easily discard them later. We find out that, having accepted them once, they are not so easily discarded. The Fathers of the Church urge us not to attempt to fight temptation by our own strength but to immediately flee to Christ.

The wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah is generally considered to center around unrestrained sexual desire which leads to depravity. This is clear from the narrative as given in Genesis 19 and also from the reference made in the epistle of St. Jude.

Canticle three also refers to the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

O my soul, thou hast followed Ham, who mocked his father. Thou hast not covered thy neighbor's shame, walking backwards with averted face. O wretched soul, thou hast not inherited the blessing of Shem, nor hast thou received, like Japheth, a spacious domain in the land of forgiveness.

These verses refer to an incident that happened some time after the ark had landed and Noah had planted a vineyard. He was affected by the fermented grape juice and was found in an embarrassing position. His son, Ham, saw him and made fun of his father. Unlike Ham, Shem and Japheth did their best to shield their father and "cover his sin". Ham's sin was mocking the faults and weakness of others. In the Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, which we say many times during Lent, we beg God to prevent us from committing this serious sin.

Yea, O Lord, King, grant me to see my failing and not condemn my brother, for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages.

When Noah realized what had happened, he cursed the descendants of Ham and blessed the descendants of Shem and Japheth.

From the Flood to the Exodus

Abraham

Canticle three also refers to Abraham

O, my soul, depart from sin, from the land of Haran, and come to the land that Abraham inherited, which flows with incorruption and eternal life.

Abraham probably does not need too much of an introduction. Abraham was born in Ur, a city in Mesopotamia. After the death of Haran, Abraham's brother, his father Terah moved his family north to a city known as Haran (perhaps named after Terah's son). This became their new home. When Abraham was seventy-five, God told him to, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee."

So far we have been presented with two righteous men, Lot and Abraham, who were told to leave the place they were living. This, of course, symbolizes the fact that we have ingrained, and therefore comfortable, ways of thinking and perceiving that need to be left behind. Prayer and the examination of our own thoughts and perceptions is required of us in the spiritual life. This is part of leaving the old man and allowing Christ to make us new. We venture beyond our own "self-image" into the spiritual unknown, relying on God.

Ishmael

Thou hast heard, O my soul, be watchful! How Ishmael was driven out as the child of a bondwoman. Take heed, lest the same thing happen to thee because of thy lust. O my

soul, thou hast become like Hagar, the Egyptian; thy free choice has been enslaved, and thou hast borne as thy child a new Ishmael, stubborn wilfulness.

We usually associate the word “lust” with illicit sexuality, but the word has a larger meaning. It includes wanting something that is not ours. This reference is an example of not submitting our will to God, that is, an example of “I want what I want, when I want it”. Our insistence on our own way does not produce good fruit.

Abraham was married to Sarah who was barren, and impatient. At Sarah's suggestion, Abraham had a son by Sarah's Egyptian maid, Hagar, and this son is Ishmael. Egypt is usually a symbol of evil, or of the passionate, unregenerate life. Thoughts and actions which arise from the wilfulness in us eventually enslave us. This is a reoccurring theme in the canon.

Jacob

Thou knowest, my soul, the ladder that was shown to Jacob, reaching up from earth to heaven. Why hast thou not provided a firm foundation for it through thy godly actions.

The ladder seen by Jacob is a symbol of many things, including the Mother of God. Perhaps in this case the ladder means the step by step, patient, progress toward God. It is very interesting how many times our Lord uses the words *patient*, or *patience* in the gospels. Patience is a fruit of faith.

Leah and Rachel

By the two wives, understand action and knowledge in contemplation. Leah is action, for she had many children; and Rachel is knowledge, for she endured great toil. And without toil, O my soul, neither action nor contemplation will succeed.

Being watchful, rather than slothful, is hard work; it is toil. Once again, we are enjoined to be watchful rather than slothful with our thoughts. If you remember, Jacob had to work for his uncle, Laban, for seven years in order to marry Rachel. He was given Leah instead, so he worked another seven years for Rachel. We know about the “patience of Job”, here we have the “patience of Jacob.”

Esau

Thou hast rivaled Esau the hated, O my soul, and given the birthright of thy first beauty to the supplanter; thou hast lost thy father's blessing and in thy wretchedness been twice supplanted, in action and in knowledge. Therefore now repent.

Jacob and Esau were twins, Esau being the elder and, by law, the one who would receive the birthright. Do you recall how Esau lost his birthright to Jacob? He came home very hungry from an unsuccessful hunting trip and asked Jacob for a bowl of the lentil soup he was cooking. Jacob said he would give Esau the soup if Esau, in turn, would give him the birthright. Esau replied, "What good is my birthright if I am going to die?" Esau, so unwilling to suffer a little, traded his birthright in order to appease his appetite. This is a good lesson for lent.

Reuben

In my misery I have followed Reuben's example, and have devised a wicked and unlawful plan against the most high God, defiling my bed as he defiled his father's.

Reuben was the oldest of Jacob's twelve sons. One day, when Jacob was out of town, Reuben slept with Bilhah, who was one of Jacob's concubines.

Joseph

I confess to Thee, O Christ my King: I have sinned, I have sinned like the brethren of Joseph, who once sold the fruit of purity and chastity. As a figure of the Lord, O my soul, the righteous and gentle Joseph was sold into bondage by his brethren; but thou hast sold thyself entirely to sin.

We probably all know how some of the brothers of Joseph, second to the youngest son of Jacob, first threw him into a pit, then sold him to a caravan heading to Egypt. This is another example of the destructive power of envy. Joseph had related to his brothers some dreams which symbolized their bowing down to him. They were angry with him, little knowing that the dreams would come true when they begged food from him in Egypt several years later.

Moses

O miserable soul, thou hast not struck and killed the Egyptian mind, as did Moses the great. Tell me, then, how wilt thou go to dwell through repentance in the wilderness empty of passions? Moses the great went to dwell in the desert. Come, seek to follow his way of life, my soul, that in contemplation thou mayest attain the vision of God in the bush.

These passages, of course, refer to the time when Moses, while still a prominent man in Egypt, saw an Egyptian guard beating an Israelite. Moses killed the guard, thinking no one

had seen him. In this passage we see an example of Egypt, and Egyptians, as symbols of the old, unregenerated man.

Korah, Datham, Abiram, Aaron, Hophni and Phinehas

Aaron offered to God fire that was blameless and undefiled, but Hophni and Phinehas brought to Him, as thou hast done, my soul, strange fire and a polluted life.

Then, later in the Canon,

Like Datham and Abiram, O my soul, thou hast become a stranger to Thy Lord; but with all thy heart cry out "spare me", that the earth may not open and swallow thee up.

Korah, Datham and Abiram were the leaders of a revolt against Moses. When the Israelites were but a short distance from the Promised Land, Moses sent six pair of men, one man from each tribe, as spies into the Promised Land. They were to get a sense of the people who inhabited the land and of the land itself. Five pair, (ten men) returned with glowing reports of the land, but told Moses that the people were strong and fierce, with many chariots. It would be impossible to defeat them. Only one pair, Joshua and Caleb, said that although it was true that the people were great, the Israelites could conquer them with God's help. When the Israelites shouted down Joshua and Caleb and despaired of entering into the new land, God told them that they would wander in the desert for 40 years, until they were all dead. Of the 600,000 people who initially left Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb actually entered the Promised Land.

God told Moses to lead the people south, away from the Promised Land. This is when Korah and his friends lead a revolt. God responded to their revolt by opening the earth which swallowed them. All their families were also killed. When the rest of the Israelites saw what had happened, they blamed Moses and spoke against him, God then sent a plague to kill the people. Aaron, however, took a censer and ran among the people, making an atonement for them. The incense being, of course, a symbol of his prayer for God's mercy. The plague then stopped.

The reference to Hophni and Phinehas does not refer to the same event, but is mentioned as a contrast to the actions of Aaron. Hophi and Phinehas were the two sons of Eli, who in the times of the judges, was both a judge and high priest. As sons of the high priest, they had privileges and responsibilities in the temple. The sons greatly misused their position to steal from the people and do all kinds of immoral things. Eli knew what was happening but did nothing but verbally scold his sons. A prophet told Eli that his sons would be killed for their

evil. Later, when Eli was told his sons had been killed by the Philistines, he fell backwards and died also.

Eli, the Priest

Thou hast drawn upon thyself, O my soul, the condemnation of Eli, the priest: thoughtlessly thou hast allowed the passions to work evil within thee, just as he permitted his children to commit transgressions.

Joshua, the son of Nun

Like Joshua, the son of Nun, search and spy out, my soul, the land of thine inheritance and take up thy dwelling within it, through obedience to the law. Rise up and make war against the passions of the flesh, as Joshua against Amalek, ever gaining the victory over the Gibeonites, thy deceitful thoughts.

This is a reference to Joshua's work as one of the twelve spies sent into the Promised Land. We are given a foretaste of heaven, symbolized by the Promised Land, when we are faithful to God.

Joshua's battle against the Amalekites (who were descendants of Esau) occurred shortly before the Israelites reached Mount Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments. During this battle, the Israelites were successful as long as Moses held out his arms, making his body into a form of a cross. When he tired and lowered his arms, the Amalekites would start to prevail over the Israelites. Aaron and a man named Hur then held up the arms of Moses until the battle was won. We need the cross and our brothers and sisters to help us in our battles with our fallen nature.

The reference to the Gibeonites concerns something that happened after the Israelites had entered the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. The Israelites had conquered the cities of Jericho and Ai. As a result, the surrounding peoples were very afraid of them. The people of Gibeon devised a plan by which they hoped to avoid defeat by the Israelites. Some of the men of Gibeon dressed themselves in rags, gathered some old dry bread and dried out wineskins and pretended to be emissaries from a distant country. They told a story about how they had heard of the wonders of the Israelites and were seeking to be their servants. The leaders of Israel, including Joshua, were deceived. The scriptures say that, "And the men took of their victuals (believed in the outer appearance), and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." (relied on their own intelligence)

When Joshua finally realized the plot, he gathered his armies together and did battle with the kingdoms who were in league with the Gibeonites. It was a very long and difficult

battle, so long in fact that Joshua had to pray that the sun stop in the sky so he would have enough time to win.

Manoah

O my soul, thou hast heard how Manoah of old beheld the Lord in a vision, and then received from his barren wife the fruit of God's promise. Let us imitate him in his devotion.

Manoah was devout Hebrew of the tribe of Dan. For a long time Manoah's wife could not conceive. Then an angel appeared to her and told her to "be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, and do not eat anything unclean" for she was to conceive and bear a son. Manoah prayed that the angel would come again to them both. When the angel did, Manoah hosted him much as Abraham had hosted the three angels which came to him. This son was Sampson.

Samson

Emulating Samson's slothfulness, O my soul, thou hast been shorn of the glory of thy works, and through love of pleasure thou hast betrayed thy life to the alien Philistines, surrendering thy chastity and blessedness.

Once again we are given an example of the enslavement which follows slothfulness. You probably all know the story of Sampson and Delilah. The lesson here could be that our slothfulness is a fruit of our pride and false self-confidence. Sampson relied on his own strength and was therefore fooled by Delilah.

Barak, Deborah and Jephthah

Barak and Jephthah the captains, with Deborah, who had a man's courage, were chosen as judges of Israel. Learn bravery from their mighty acts, O my soul, and be strong.

The period of the judges has been called by some the "see-saw days." This is because after the death of Joshua, the Israelites alternated between faith in God and unfaithfulness. When the Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord, they were conquered by another nation, when they were faithful, they were free. (A good lesson for any country)

At one time they were conquered by Jabin, King of the Canaanites. Deborah, a prophetess, was the judge of Israel. She called a man named Barak and together they inspired the people to repent, fight against the Canaanites, and regain their freedom.

Jephthah was another judge who, later, lead the Israelites against the Ammonites.

Jael, who pierced Sisera

O my soul, thou knowest the manly courage of Jael, who of old pierced Sisera through his temple and brought salvation to Israel with the nail of her tent. In this thou mayest see a prefiguring of the Cross.

Sisera was the captain of the armies of Canaan. When the Israelites routed the armies of Canaan, this Sisera fled on foot. He went to the Kenites, allies of the Canaanites, and was invited into the house of a man named Heber. Heber's wife, Jael, knew the whole situation and as Sisera was resting, she took a large spike and hammered it into his head. This made the defeat of the Canaanites complete.

Gideon

O my soul, consider the fleece of Gideon, and receive the dew from heaven; bend down like a hart and drink the water that flows from the Law, when its letter is wrung out for thee through study.

Gideon was a simple man who lived while the Midianites ruled over the Israelites. He was hiding one day behind a wine press when an angel came to him and called to him, "The Lord is with you, mighty one of the armies." His first response was something like, "Who? Me? What armies?" Gideon told the angel that he was "the smallest in my father's house."

He asked for several "proofs" that indeed God would be with him, first that a fleece put out on the threshing floor would be filled with dew while the surrounding floor would be dry, then the opposite, that the fleece would be dry and the floor wet.

When Gideon was convinced, he gathered an army of 32,000 men. God told him that the army was too large and that anyone who was afraid should go home. All but 10,000 left. The army was still too large, so God gave another test. All went to drink by the river. Everyone who got down on their knees to drink were sent home. Gideon was left with 300 men. With these he conquered the Midianites. God told him that He reduced the number so Gideon would not say that he had conquered them "with his own hand." How easily we give ourselves credit for things God has done.

Hannah and her son Samuel

Hannah, who loveth self-restraint and chastity, when speaking to God moved her lips in praise, but her voice was not heard; and he who was barren bore a son worthy of her prayer.

Great Samuel, son of Hannah, was born at Ramah and brought up in the house of the Lord; and he was numbered among the judges of Israel. Eagerly follow his example, O my soul, and before thou judgest others, judge thine own works.

Hannah was another virtuous woman who was barren. She was silently pouring out her heart to God in the temple when Eli, the high priest and judge at the time, came in. He accursed her of being drunk, harshly telling her to leave the temple and stop her drunkenness. She finally convinced him that she was not drunk, but simply crying out the Lord for a son. That son was Samuel, the last and perhaps the greatest of the judges.

The Period of the Kings

Saul

When Saul once lost his father's asses, in searching for them he found himself proclaimed as king. But watch, my soul, lest unknown to thyself thou prefer thine animal appetites to the Kingdom of Christ.

Unfortunately, Saul did fall prey to his passions. He became so jealous of David that he lost his kingship. God rejected him.

David

David, the forefather of God, once sinned doubly, pierced with the arrow of adultery and the spear of murder. But thou, my soul, art more gravely sick than he. For worse than any acts are the impulses of thy will. David once joined sin to sin, adding murder to fornication; yet then he showed at once a twofold repentance. But thou, my soul, hast done worse things than he, yet thou hast not repented before God.

The power of David's position as king apparently overcame him one day when he saw a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, bathing. Although she was married to one of his soldiers, named Uriah, he lay with her and she conceived. When David realized that she had conceived by him, he sent for the husband, Uriah, from the battlefield, and told him to stay home with his wife for a while and rest from the battles. David was trying to cover the fact that he was the father of the child. Uriah would not go to his house, but slept outside the king's

house. He said that he could not take comfort in his home when his comrades were in battle. When David realized that Uriah's dedication would not allow him to be a part of his deceit, he sent him into the fiercest part of the battle so he would be killed. Once Uriah was killed, David married Bathsheba.

Of course, the Lord knew all and sent Nathan, the prophet, to David. Through a parable, Nathan brought David to see what he had done. David repented bitterly. We read of David's repentance in Psalm 50.

Uzzah

When the ark was being carried in a cart and the ox stumbled, Uzzah did no more than touch it, but the wrath of God smote him. O my soul, flee from his presumption and respect with reverence the things of God.

While Saul was king and Eli was high priest, the ark of the covenant was stolen by the Philistines, the arch-enemy of the Israelites. When the Ark was brought into the Philistine's temple where their idols were kept, they fell and were smashed. The Ark caused the Philistines all kinds of difficulties so they put it on a cart drawn by two oxen, and pointed the oxen toward Jerusalem. The oxen did not make it all the way to Jerusalem, but stopped about 7 miles short, at the house of a man named, Abinadab. There it stayed there until David was crowned king.

Shortly after being crowned king, David started making plans to return the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. It was put in a cart drawn by two oxen. At one point the cart seemed to be tipping so Uzzah, one of the sons of Abinadab, stretched out his hand to steady the Ark. He was immediately killed when he touched the Ark. Perhaps Uzzah thought he had special privileges since the Ark had been at his house for so long.

Absalom and Ahitophel

Thou hast heard of Absalom, and how he rebelled against nature; thou knowest of the unholy deeds by which he defiled his father David's bed. Yet thou hast followed him in his passionate and sensual desires.

Thy free dignity, O my soul, thou hast subjected to thy body; for thou hast found in the enemy another Ahitophel, and hast agreed to all his counsels. But Christ Himself has brought them to nothing and saved thee from them all.

Absalom was one of the sons of David and was well respected. The Scriptures say of him, "... in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." However, Absalom's goodness and beauty were all on the outside. Inside he was full of pride, ambition and deceit. He rebelled and fought against his father.

Ahitophel was one of David's counselors, and like Absalom, was highly respected. When Absalom decided to turn on his father and take over the throne, Ahitophel joined him. Together they forced David to leave Jerusalem. Ahitophel wanted to immediately pursue David before he (David) had time to gather those faithful to him. Through a series of events, Ahitophel was delayed and David rebuilt his forces. When Ahitophel saw that he was to be defeated, he set his house in order and hung himself.

We see here a foreshadowing of events which were to take place in the life of Christ almost a thousand years later. Judas betrayed Christ, just as Ahitophel betrayed David, the king. Both Judas and Ahitophel hung themselves. Psalm 54, which is read at Sixth Hour refers to these events.

For if mine enemy had reviled me, I might have endured it. And if he that hateth me had spoken boastful words against me I might have hid myself from him. But thou it was, O man of like soul with me, my guide and my familiar friend, thou who together with me didst sweeten my repasts; in the house of God I walked with thee in oneness of mind.

Solomon

Solomon the wonderful, who was full of the grace of wisdom, once did evil in the sight of heaven and turned away from God. Thou hast become like him, my soul, through thy accursed life.

Solomon as the son of David and Bathsheba, but not the one conceived in sin. That child died. Solomon was conceived when David and Bathsheba were married. Although Solomon pleased God initially by praying for wisdom, he had a long period in his life during which he was ruled by his passions. He repented in the end.

Rehoboam

O my soul, thou hast rivaled Rehoboam, who paid no attention to his father's counselors, and Jeroboam, that evil servant and renegade of old. But flee from their example and cry to God: I have sinned, take pity on me.

Rehoboam was the son of Solomon who, after the kingdom was divided, became the King of Judah. Some representatives of the people came to him asking for lower taxes. Rehoboam told them that he would give his answer in three days. He then spoke with his father's counselor's who advised him to be merciful. Then he spoke with some men his own age who advised him to make the taxes even greater. He listened to the younger men, who suggested that he tell the people, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

Jeroboam was the first king of the northern kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel. He had been a servant of Solomon and gained his position as king of Israel through treason. He encouraged the worship of idols.

Ahab, Jezebel and Eliiah and Zarephath

Heaven is closed to thee, my soul, and a famine from God has seized thee; for thou hast been disobedient, as Ahab was to the words of Elijah the Tishbite. But imitate the widow Zarepheth and feed the prophet's soul.

Ahab was one of the kings of Israel. After Solomon's rule the kingdom was divided into the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah in the south. Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, encouraged the worship of many different idols. The prophet Elijah was constantly in opposition to them. Elijah was so enraged by the blasphemes of Ahab that he prayed to God that it would not rain for three and a half years.

At one point Elijah fled because Ahab was going to kill him. God told Elijah to go to a certain widow, Zarephath. He met the widow gathering sticks in preparation for a last meal for her son and herself. Because of the drought she had only enough food for one meal. Elijah told her to fix a meal for him as well, and the Lord would not let her food supply run out until the rains returned.

Hezekiah and Manasseh

My days have vanished as the dream of one awaking; and so, like Hezekiah, I weep upon my bed, that years may be added to my life. But what Isaiah will come to thee, my soul, except the God of all?

By deliberate choice, my soul, thou hast incurred the guilt of Manasseh, setting up the passions as idols and multiplying abominations. But with fervent heart emulate his repentance and acquire compunction.

Hezekiah was one of the kings of Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem. Hezekiah was one of the good kings. He destroyed the idols that had been erected. However, at one point Jerusalem was being besieged by the Assyrians who were conquering all the surrounding area and Hezekiah was despairing. The servants of Hezekiah sought help from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied that Jerusalem would be spared and that God would disburse the Assyrians. Hezekiah begged God for mercy and, in the morning, the citizens of Jerusalem looked over the city walls and saw 185,000 dead Assyrians.

Later when Hezekiah was very sick, Isaiah came to him and told him that he should set his house in order for he was going to die. Hezekiah wept upon his bed and, again, begged God for mercy. The Lord heard him and granted him fifteen more years of life.

Manasseh was a son of Hezekiah, and therefore the next king of Judah. However, he restored the idols and was very wicked, building altars for idols in the temple itself. Once again, God had to send punishment upon the people. The Assyrians captured Manasseh and took him to Babylon. There Manasseh humbled himself before God and repented. When Manasseh was released from Babylon, he tore down the idols he had previously erected and restored the temple to its proper use.

The penitential prayer of Manassah is part of Great Compline.

Gehazi

O wretched soul, always thou hast imitated the polluted thoughts of Gehazi. Cast from thee, at least in thine old age, his love for money. Flee from the fire of hell, turn away from thy wickedness.

Gehazi was the servant of the prophet Elisha. Elisha had healed a man named Naaman of leprosy. When Naaman wanted to give Elisha some money, the prophet refused. After Naaman left, Gehazi thought of a way to get some money for himself. He ran after Naaman and made up a story about Elisha having a few visitors and needing some money. Naaman gave him two talents. Gehazi thought he had made some easy money, but when he returned to Elisha, the prophet knew what he had done and prophesied that the leprosy of Naaman would now come upon Gehazi.

Uzziah

Thou hast followed Uzziah, my soul, and hast his leprosy in double form; for thy thoughts are wicked, and thine acts unlawful. Leave what thou hast done, and hasten to repentance.

Uzziah was one of the kings of Judah and reigned very well, conquering the pagan nations as God had directed and making many improvements in the kingdom. “But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.” He decided one day that he could act as one of the priests and burn incense upon the altar of incense. The priests and several rulers confronted Uzziah but he rebuked them. As Uzziah continued to swing the censer in violation of the Law, his face was covered with leprosy. He died a leper.

Let us finish this talk with the words of St. Andrew. “ All the names of the Old Testament, have I set before thee, my soul. Imitate the acts of the righteous and flee the sins of the wicked.”

Holy Father Andrew, pray to God for us.