

THE TRIODION PERIOD

“O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, faintheartedness, the lust of power, and idle talk.

“But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to your servant.

“Yea, O Lord, and King grant me to see my own sin and not to judge my brother, for You are blessed from all ages to all ages. Amen”

(Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian)

Definition

The word Triodion: It is a Greek word meaning three odes, that is, three stanzas. The word “ωδή” refers to stanzas of praise or hymns, from the verb of αείδω “to sing”. This period has been called "Triodion" because the Canons (hymns) of 9 odes (stanzas) are replaced with the liturgical book with Canons of 3 odes called “The Triodion”. (See below explanation of words: Canons - Odes).

The Triodion period takes its name from the book that we use in this ecclesiastical time.

The Triodion begins with Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee and lasts until Holy Saturday.

It is a time of special compunction, a return to oneself and to God, in order to rise with Christ as a new creation in sincere repentance.

It is a time of self-purification when we cry: "O God have mercy on me, a sinner."

This is what we read in the Synaxarion of the beginning of the Triodion: “O Creator of all above and below, as Thou receivest the thrice-holy hymn from the angels, so also from mankind receive the Triodion”.

Heaven and Earth join to form a single choir. Angels and humans come together to praise the "Creator of all", angels sing lauds to the Holy Trinity (Trisagion- the Thrice Holy Hymn) and human beings respond with honorable odes of the Triodion, filled with compunction.

The author of the Triodion, Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, says that the three odes were first composed by Cosmas of the Hymnographer, Bishop of Maiuma who arranged them after the model of the life-giving Holy Trinity to be chanted on Holy Week. Then several authors including Theodore and Joseph of the Studite Monastery in Constantinople followed him; they wrote Canons for each week of Great Lent.

The Triodion is characterized by three hymns that are chanted at Matins after the Gospel and Psalm 50, from the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee to the Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt.

These hymns form a liturgical unit inspired by Psalm 50; they begin thus:

- “Glory...The gates of repentance, do Thou open unto me...”

- “Both now...Guide me on the paths of salvation, O Theotokos...”

- “Have mercy...As I the wretched one ponder the multitude of evil deeds I have done...”

This period can be divided into three basic phases:

1- The PreLenten period, 2– The Great Lent of forty days 3- Holy Week.

1- FIRST PHASE: THE PRELENTEN PERIOD (PREPARATION FOR LENT)

It is a one-month period that includes 4 Sundays:

-The Publican and Pharisee - The Prodigal Son – The Sunday of Judgement (Meatfare Sunday) -The Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheesefare Sunday).

Note:

- This period includes the Saturday of Souls, which precedes the Sunday of Judgment.

- Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday are a period of preparation for Holy Week: we behold the Lord Jesus resurrecting Lazarus from the grave as a promise of His Resurrection.

2- SECOND PHASE: GREAT LENT

This phase includes 5 Sundays: The Sunday of Orthodoxy- The Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas- The Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross- The Sunday of Saint John Climacus- The Sunday of St Mary of Egypt

During this period, we pray:

- Great Compline (Monday to Thursday)

-The Akathist Hymn for the Mother of God (partly read each Friday night of the first four weeks and read as a whole on the fifth week called the Service of the Great Akathist).

-The Canon of Saint Andrew the Crete (Canon of Repentance). It is read in part during Great Compline every day of the First week of Lent and in whole on Thursday of the fifth week which is called Thursday of Repentance.

Sunday of Orthodoxy, Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas, The Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross, The Sunday of St John Climacus, Sunday of St Mary of Egypt ,

Lazarus Saturday Jesus declares His victory over death because Lazarus had been dead in the tomb for 4 days.

Palm Sunday (The Lord's Entry to Jerusalem) In fact, Jesus enters Jerusalem as king and ascends the cross as His throne. What a great day! The king of glory, God Incarnate, Who became a human being, comes deliberately to Jerusalem to be crucified.

3- THIRD PHASE: HOLY WEEK

This phase starts on Palm Sunday with the first service of "the Bridegroom" until Holy Saturday.

Liturgical Notes

Canons: In the daily Matins, we read Canons. They are a group of hymns, that consist of 9 odes each, following the 9 canticles of the Old Testament.

The Triodion is used very Saturday eve and Sunday Morning starting from the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee in Vespers.

On Meatfare Sunday, we start using the Triodion daily until Saturday of Holy Week.

The prayers of Cheesefare week are a combination of the Triodion and the Octoechos, except for Wednesday and Friday, when they are just like in Great Lent.

The three odes are used with the beginning of Great Lent, every day: the 8th and 9th ode, with one other daily ode. Monday, for example, we read the 1st, 8th, and 9th odes. Tuesday, we read the 2nd, 8th, and 9th odes.

The Ode:

The Ode in Orthodox Liturgy is a chanted stanza of the Canon that is recited in Matins.

A Canon has nine odes; yet, the 2nd ode is only read in Great Lent.

The nine odes are inspired and based on the biblical canticles that can be found in the Great Horologion:

1. The Ode of Moses in Exodus (Exodus 15:1-19)
2. The Ode of Moses in Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 32:1-43) (Note: this is sung only on Tuesdays in Lent)
3. The Prayer of Anna the mother of Samuel the prophet (1 Samuel 2:1-10)
4. The Prayer of Habakkuk the Prophet (Habakkuk 3:2-19)
5. The Prayer of Isaiah the Prophet (Isaiah 26:9-20)
6. The Prayer of Jonah the Prophet (Jonah 2:3-10)
7. The Prayer of the Three Holy Children (Daniel 3:26-56)*
8. The Song of the Three Holy Children (The *Benedicite*, Daniel 3:57-88)*
9. The Song of the Theotokos (The *Magnificat*, Luke 1:46-55) and the Prayer of Zacharias the father of the Forerunner (The *Benedictus*, Luke 1:68-79)

*These odes are found only in the Septuagint. Verse numberings according to *Psalter*, which differs from *Brenton*.

Conclusion

The writer of the odes draws inspiration from the Bible, but he reformulates the biblical ideas in a way to teach us the mystery of repentance. He remembers and confesses his many sins, senses the day of judgment and fears it, but he believes deeply in God and yields himself to His great mercies.

This faith and this hope moved by repentance are salvific, as David was saved when he cried: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your great mercy." This is the true resurrection.