

THE THREE CANONS

A tradition has developed in the Church of reading three (sometimes four) Canons the evening I before receiving Holy Communion. Many monastic Rules of Prayer prescribe this reading daily. Many Canons have been composed over the years, and certain Canons are prescribed for specific days of the week. Herein are provided three of the most commonly used Canons, printed in the order in which they are traditionally read. This order can also serve as a model for combining other Canons. If these Canons are not read during Compline, they are preceded by the Opening Prayers and Psalm 50.

THE THREE CANONS

ODE 1 (Tone 6)

Irmos: Treading over the floor of the sea as over dry land, and seeing their pursuer Pharaoh drown, Israel cried out: Let us sing to God a song of victory!

Canon of Repentance

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Sinful and burdened, I now approach Thee, my Master and my God. I dare not look up towards heaven, but simply pray, saying: grant me, Lord, the sense to weep bitterly over my deeds.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

O woe is me, a sinner! I am the most wretched of men! There is no repentance in me! Grant me tears, Lord, that I may weep bitterly over my deeds.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

O senseless and wretched man, thou art destroying thy life in laziness! Think about thy life and turn to the Lord God, weeping bitterly over thy deeds.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

O most pure Mother of God, look on me, a sinner, and deliver me from the snares of the devil. Direct me onto the path of repentance, that I may weep bitterly over my deeds.

Canon to the Theotokos

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Beset by many temptations, I run to thee, seeking salvation. Save me from burdens and evils, O Virgin Mother of the Word.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

The increase of passions troubles me, filling my soul with great despondency. Still it, O Maiden, with the stillness of thy Son and God, O All Undeiled One.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

I pray thee, O Virgin who bore our Savior and God, deliver me from terrors! I run to thee now, laying before thee my soul and my thoughts.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

O only Mother of God, grant me, who am afflicted in body and soul, divine visitation and thine own concern, for thou are good and gavest birth to the Good One.

Canon to the Guardian Angel

Lord Jesus Christ, my God, have mercy on me!

Grant, O Savior, that Thy servant may worthily hymn and praise the bodiless Angel who is mine instructor and guardian.

Holy Angel of the Lord, my guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

I lie alone in folly and laziness, O my instructor and Guardian. Do not leave me to perish!

Glory to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

Direct my mind, through thy prayers, to accomplish the commandments of God, that I may receive from God the remission of my sins. Teach me to hate evil, I pray thee.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

With my Guardian Angel, O Virgin, pray to the Benefactor for thy servant. Teach me to accomplish the commandments of thy Son and my Creator.

ODE 3

Irmos: None is holy as Thou, O Lord my God! Thou hast raised the strength of Thy faithful, O Good One, and made us stand firmly on the rock of Thy confession.

Canon of Repentance

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

When the thrones will be set up for the dread judgment, the deeds of all men will be recalled. Alas for the sinners who will be sent to torment! Knowing this, my soul, repent of thine evil deeds!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

The righteous shall rejoice, but sinners shall lament. No one will be able to help us at that moment — our deeds will condemn us! Before the end cometh, repent of thine evil deeds!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Woe is me, a great sinner! I have defiled myself in deed and thought and cannot even shed a single tear in my hard-heartedness. Free thyself from the earth my soul, and repent of thine evil deeds.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Your Son calleth, O Lady, and teacheth us what is good. Yet I, a sinner, always flee from good. Have mercy on me, nevertheless, O merciful one, that I may repent of mine evil deeds.

Canon to the Theotokos

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

I hold thee as the Intercessor and Protection of my life, O Virgin Birth-Giver of God. Pilot me to thy haven, O Cause of good things, O only all-hymned Support of the faithful.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

I pray, O Virgin: dispel the storm of my sorrows and spiritual turmoil. Thou art the Bride of God who bore the Origin of stillness and alone art most pure.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Pour a wealth of generosity for all, O thou who didst bear the Benefactor, the Cause of all good. Thou canst do anything, for God hath blessed thee, the Bearer of Christ Who is mighty in strength.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Help me, O Virgin, for I am cruelly tried by severe illness and painful afflictions. I know, Ever-Undeiled One, that thou art an inexhaustible and generous treasury of healings.

Canon to the Guardian Angel

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

I have laid all my thoughts and my soul before thee, my Guardian. Deliver me from every assault of the Enemy.

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

The Enemy humiliateth and oppresseth me and teacheth me always to do his will. But thou, my Instructor, leave me not to perish!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

Grant me with thanksgiving and fervor to sing a hymn to my Creator and God and to thee my good Guardian Angel. Free me from mine oppressive enemies, O my Deliverer.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Heal, Most Pure One, the most painful wounds of my soul and drive off the enemies that are constantly warring against me.

Lord have mercy! (3 times)

Sessional Hymn, Tone 6

I think of the Dread Day and weep over mine evil deeds. How shall I answer the immortal King? Or how shall a prodigal like me dare to look up at the judge? O compassionate Father, only-begotten Son, and Holy Spirit: have mercy on me!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

Sessional Hymn, Tone 2

In fervent love I cry to thee, O Guardian of my soul, my all-holy Angel: protect me and keep me always from the entrapment of the evil one. Direct me to the heavenly life, enlightening, illumining, and strengthening me.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Kontakion, Tone 6

Steadfast protectress of Christians, constant advocate before the Creator: do not despise the cry of us sinners, but in thy goodness come speedily to help us who call on thee in faith. Hasten to hear our petition and to intercede for us, O Theotokos, for thou dost always protect those who honor thee.

ODE 4

Irmos: "Christ is my strength, my God and my Lord," the sacred Church reverently sings with a mighty voice, rejoicing in the Lord.

Canon of Repentance

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Our present path is wide and conducive to pleasures, but bitter will the Last Day be when the soul will part from the body. O man, beware of those pleasures, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Why dost thou mistreat the poor? Why dost thou withhold the worker's pay? Why dost thou not love thy brother? Why dost thou pursue lust and pride? Abandon all that, my soul, and repent for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

O foolish man! How long wilt thou bustle like a bee, gathering thy wealth? It will soon perish like dust and ashes. Seek rather the Kingdom of God.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Have mercy on me a sinner, O Lady Theotokos, and strengthen me in virtues. Protect me, so that insolent death may not seize me unprepared, and bring me, O Virgin, to the Kingdom of God.

Canon to the Theotokos

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

O Bride of God, who bore the Lord Pilot, still the tumult of my passions and the storm of my transgressions.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Grant me the abyss of thy kindness, upon which I call, O thou who gavest birth to the Compassionate One, the Savior of those who hymn thee.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Enjoying thy gifts, O Pure One, we sing a hymn of thanksgiving to thee whom we know to be the Mother of God.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

As thou lovest good, O Theotokos, the only ever-Virgin, help me as I lie on my bed of illness and infirmity.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

We are delivered from every difficulty, O All-Hymned One, for we have thee as our hope, our confirmation, and immovable wall.

Canon to the Guardian Angel

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

Pray to God Who loveth mankind, my Guardian, and do not abandon me! Keep my life in peace and grant me invincible salvation.

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

I received thee from God, holy Angel, as a helper and guardian of my life. Free me from all harm, I pray thee!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

Cleanse my vileness with thy holiness, O my Guardian! May I be excluded from the left side through thy prayers and become a partaker of glory.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

I am bewildered by the evils that surround me, Most Pure One. Deliver me from them quickly, for I run only to thee.

ODE 5

Irmos: I pray Thee, O Good One: Enlighten with Thy Divine Light the souls which look to Thee from early dawn, that they may know Thee, O Word of God, as the True God Who calleth them out from the darkness of sin.

Canon of Repentance

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Remember, wretched man, how thou have been enslaved to lies, slander, crime, infirmities, and wild beasts because of thy sins. Is this what thou didst want, my sinful soul?

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

My members tremble, for I have been guilty through all of them: my eyes by seeing, my ears by hearing, my tongue by speaking evil, surrendering my whole self to Gehenna. Is this what thou didst want, my sinful soul?

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Thou didst receive the Prodigal and the thief who repented, O Savior. I alone have been weighed down by sinful laziness and submitted to evil deeds. Is this what thou didst want my sinful soul?

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

O Mother of God, the wondrous and swift helper of all mankind, help me, the unworthy, for this is what my sinful soul wanteth!

Canon to the Theotokos

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Fill my heart with joy, O Pure One who bore the Cause of Joy, by giving us thine incorruptible joy.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Deliver us from harm, Pure Theotokos who bore the Eternal Redemption and the Peace which passeth all understanding.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Lessen the gloom of my transgressions with the enlightenment of thy brightness, O Bride of God who bore the divine and eternal Light.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Heal the infirmity of my soul by granting me thy visitation, O Pure One, and grant me wholeness by thy prayers.

Canon to the Guardian Angel

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

Since thou hast boldness before God, my holy Guardian, pray to Him for my deliverance from the evils that harm me.

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

Brightly illumine my soul, O bright Light, the Angel given to me by God, my instructor and guardian.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

Though I sleep in the evil weight of sin, protect me as one who keepeth vigil, O Angel of God, and rouse me to praise through thy prayers.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O Lady Mary, the unwedded Theotokos and hope of the faithful: Cast down the arrogance of the Enemy and give joy to those who hymn thee.

ODE 6

Irmos: Beholding the Sea of Life raging with the storm of temptations, I have fled to Thy calm haven and cry to Thee: Deliver my life from destruction, O Most-merciful One!

Canon of Repentance

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

I have lived my life on earth prodigally and committed my soul to darkness. Now, O Merciful Master, I pray: free me from the Enemy's labor and give me the intelligence to do Thy will.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Who doeth what I do? As a pig walloweth in mud, so do I serve sin! Pull me out of this mire, Lord, and give me the heart to accomplish Thy commandments.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Lift yourself towards God, wretched man, recalling thy transgressions! Fall down before the Creator with tears and groans! Being merciful, He will give thee the mind to know His will.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Keep us from both visible and invisible harm, O Virgin Theotokos! Receive my prayers, Most Pure One, and bear them to thy Son, that He may give me the mind to do His will.

Canon to the Theotokos

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

My nature was captive of death and corruption, O Virgin, but thy Son and Lord saved it from both by surrendering Himself to death. Pray to Him for my deliverance from the evil deeds of mine enemies.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

I know that thou art the Intercessor of my life, O Virgin, my firm Protectress, healing the rebellions of temptations and dispelling the wiles of demons. I pray constantly that thou wilt deliver me from my destructive passions.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

We have obtained thee, O Maiden, as a wall of refuge and a most thorough salvation of souls. The multitude of human sorrows is not too great for thee, and we ever rejoice in thine illumination. Save us now, O Lady, from passions and misfortunes.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

I am lying on a bed of infirmity and there is no cure for my flesh. But I pray to thee, the Good One who bore the God and Savior of the world: raise me from the destruction of illnesses.

Canon to the Guardian Angel

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

I pray to thee, holy Angel whom God hath give to me as my good guardian: free me from every temptation!

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

Shine light on my mind, O good one, and enlighten me! I pray thee, holy Angel: teach me always to have wholesome thoughts.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

Deliver my heart from this present noise, O my Guardian, and strengthen me to keep a good vigil, wondrously instructing me towards life-giving stillness.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

The Word of God dwelt in thee, O Theotokos, and showed thee to mankind as a Ladder to Heaven. Through thee, He Who is on high came down to us.

Lord, have mercy! (3 times)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever unto ages of ages. Amen.

Kontakion, Tone 6

O my soul, why dost thou enrich thyself with sins? Why dost thou do the Devil's will? In what hast thou put thy hope? Cease all this and turn to God, weeping and crying: O compassionate Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!

Ikos

Contemplate, my soul, the bitter hour of death and the dread judgment of thy Creator and God. Threatening angels will seize thee, my soul, and lead thee to eternal flames. Repent before thy death, therefore, crying: O Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!

ODE 7

Irmos: The Angel made the furnace a source of dew for the pious youths, and the Will of God, which burned the Chaldeans, made the persecutor call out: Blessed art Thou, O God of our fathers!

Canon of Repentance

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Put not thy hope in corruptible wealth, my soul, nor in things unjustly gathered. Thou knowest not to whom thou wilt leave it all. Instead, cry out: O Christ God, have mercy on me, the unworthy!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Remember, my soul, both the eternal life and the Heavenly Kingdom prepared for the saints and the outer darkness and divine wrath prepared for the wicked. Then cry out: O Christ God, have mercy on me, the unworthy!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

Count not on physical health, my soul, nor on fleeting beauty. Thou seest how both the strong and the young die. Instead, cry out: O Christ God, have mercy on me, the unworthy!

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Fall down before the Mother of God, my soul, and pray to her, for she is the swift helper of penitents. She will entreat her Son, Christ God, and He will have mercy on me, the unworthy!

Canon to the Theotokos

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Desiring to establish our salvation, O Savior, Thou didst enter the Virgin's womb, showing her as the Intercessor for the world. Blessed art Thou, O God of our Fathers!

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Pray to Him Who is mercifully disposed and Whom thou didst bear, O Pure Mother, that we may be delivered from transgressions and defilement of soul, who cry out with faith: Blessed art Thou, O God of our fathers!

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Thou didst show her who gave birth to Thee as a source of healing, a strong pillar, and a gate of repentance for those who cry out: Blessed art Thou, O God of our fathers!

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Grant healing from physical weakness and spiritual infirmities to those who draw near to thy Protection with love, O Virgin Birthgiver of God, who didst bear Christ the Savior for us.

Canon to the Guardian Angel

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

Have pity on me, Angel of the Lord, and pray to God for me, for He has given thee to me forever as a helper, instructor, and guardian throughout my life.

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

God entrusted my wretched soul to thee undefiled, Holy Angel. Do not let it be killed by thieves on its journey, but direct it rather to the path of repentance.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

I bring my soul, completely shamed by mine evil thoughts and deeds. Hasten to me, my Instructor, and grant me the healing of good thoughts which lead me forever on the right path.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

For the sake of the Theotokos, O Personal Wisdom of the Most High, fill with wisdom and divine strength those who cry out: Blessed art Thou, O God of our fathers!

ODE 8

Irmos: Thou didst cause dew to pour from the flames over the pious youths, and didst burn the sacrifice of a righteous man with water -- for Thou doest all things, O Christ, by Thy Will alone. We exalt Thee throughout all ages.

Canon of Repentance

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

How can I not weep when I think of death? I have seen my brother lying in the tomb without glory and without form. What can I expect? What can I hope? Only grant me, Lord, repentance before the end. *(twice)*

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

I believe that Thou wilt come to judge, the living and the dead, and that everyone I will stand in his rank: the old and the young; masters and princes; virgins and priests. Where will I find myself? Therefore, I cry out: grant me, Lord, repentance before the end.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Receive mine unworthy prayer, Most Pure Theotokos. Keep me from sudden death, and grant me repentance before the end.

Canon to the Theotokos

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

O Virgin, do not disdain those who need thy help, hymning and exalting thee forever.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Thou healest the infirmities of my soul and the illnesses of my body, O Virgin, that I may glorify thee, O Pure One, forever.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Thou pourest an abundance of healing, O Virgin, on those who hymn thee with faith and exalt thine inexpressible birth-giving.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Thou chasest away the wiles of temptation and the onsets of passions, O Virgin. We therefore hymn thee forever.

Canon to the Guardian Angel

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

Most good Angel, sent from God: strengthen my life and never abandon me.

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

I hymn thee forever, most blessed and good Angel, the Instructor and Guardian of my soul.

We bless the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Lord:

Be my protection and rampart on the day when all mankind will be tried and all deeds will be tested, both the good and the bad.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Be the help and stillness of thy servant, Ever-Virgin Theotokos, and never release me from thy service.

ODE 9

Irmos: No man can see God, upon Whom the Angelic ranks dare not gaze. But through thee, O Pure One, the Incarnate Word was revealed to mankind. Magnifying Him with the heavenly hosts, we call thee blessed.

Canon of Repentance

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

I now turn to you, angels, archangels, and all the heavenly host who stand by the throne of God: pray to your Creator that He deliver my soul from eternal torments.

Have mercy on me. O God, have mercy on me!

I now weep before you, holy patriarchs, kings and prophets, apostles and hierarchs, and all the elect of Christ: help me at the Judgment, that my soul be saved from the strength of the Enemy.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!

I now lift up my hands to you, holy martyrs, desert-dwellers, virgins, righteous ones, and all saints who pray to the Lord for the whole world: may He have mercy on me at the hour of my death.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Help me, Mother of God, for I have great hope in thee! Pray to thy Son, that when He sitteth to judge the living and the dead, He may place me at His right hand, even though I am unworthy.

Canon to the Theotokos

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

O Virgin who didst bear Christ and wipest away every tear from every face: turn not away from my flowing tears.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

O Virgin who didst receive the fullness of joy which destroyed the sorrow of sin: fill my heart with joy!

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Be a haven and intercession, an indestructible wall, a refuge, protection and rejoicing for those who run to thee, O Virgin.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Enlighten with the rays of thy light those who in the True Faith confess thee to be the Theotokos, O Virgin, dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Heal me, O Virgin, as I lie humbled on the place of misfortune, bringing me from illness to health.

Canon to the Guardian Angel

Lord Jesus Christ, my God, have mercy on me!

Have mercy on me, my only Savior, since Thou art merciful and compassionate, and join me to the choir of the Just.

Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner!

Grant that I may always think and do what is good and useful, O Angel of the Lord, and show me to be strong and spotless in weakness.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

Since thou art bold before the Heavenly King, pray to Him with all the bodiless I powers, that He may have mercy on me, a wretch.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Thou hast great boldness before the One Who took flesh from thee, O Virgin. Remove me from my fetters and grant me freedom and salvation through thy prayers.