

Paul Stetsenko

The Three Hermits

(Children's Opera)

Story by Leo Tolstoy
Libretto by Tandy Martin

THE THREE HERMITS

Music by Paul Stetsenko

Libretto by Tandy Martin based on the story by Leo Tolstoy

SYNOPSIS

Prologue

In a summer garden, a teacher and children play. The Teacher gathers the children, and asks if there is anything they want to learn today. They reply, "We want to dance, play, read..." They also ask serious questions, "Where do we go when we sleep? How long is time? How do we dream?" One child says, "I want to learn how to pray," to which the Teacher replies, "You already know how: open your heart, and God will listen." The child persists, "But I want to know how to do it right." The Teacher turns to the whole group and asks them if there is anything they are thankful for. The children offer their prayer of thanksgiving. The same child again says that she does not know any "real" prayers and wants to do it just like grownups do. The children second that request, so the Teacher tells a story.

OPERA

A group of pilgrims travel by a large boat to a remote shrine, lead by their Bishop. As they approach a particularly treacherous river bend, one sailor asks the other about three strange characters who live in complete isolation on the island. They are called hermits, and they have only been seen when they helped the drowning sailors or boatmen in predicament. The other sailor replies that little is known about them. The Bishop overhears the conversation and is interested in meeting these hermits. The first sailor tells the Bishop his story. A few years ago, he was saved from a shipwreck by these hermits. They were weird, old, their clothes were tattered, and they didn't speak a word except for "Have mercy on us, Lord..." This captures the Bishop's imagination. He would like to meet these three hermits, and he asks to be taken to the island. The sailors reluctantly agree.

The first words that the Bishop hears from the hermits are indeed "Have mercy on us, Lord." The hermits bow to the Bishop, asking for blessing. The Bishop immediately inquires about their spiritual life and of their rule of prayer. The hermits' simple answer is "We only know one prayer: *Three are Ye, three are we, have mercy on us, Lord.*" The Bishop is taken aback by this strange prayer. He recognizes the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but it sounds vaguely heretical. Without further inquiries, he declares their prayer wrong and teaches them how to pray properly the Lord's Prayers. However, the Hermits seem to be incapable of remembering or even making sense of the lines; nevertheless, they proceed earnestly. The Bishop is proud of his accomplishment and instructs them to keep the new rule of prayer. He sails back to the ship, but the Hermits can be heard singing "Three are Ye, three are we..."

Upon the Bishop's return to the ship, one of the sailors points to the horizon and calls everybody's attention to a strange sight. Everybody looks to where the sailor points and to their astonishment they see the three Hermits running on water towards the ship. The hermits reach the ship and bow to the Bishop. Everyone is shocked and humbled. The hermits tell the Bishop that as soon as he left, they began to forget the words and after a while could remember nothing, but that they want the Bishop to teach what goes after "Our Father..." The Bishop recognizes the Holy Presence in the Hermits, and tells them that it is not his place to teach them how to pray, and he only asks them instead to pray for all of them, the sinners. The Bishop is profoundly changed by the experience, for he realizes that until now he didn't know what "prayer of the heart" meant, and that what he had felt towards God was not love but merely a duty. The pilgrims and the Bishop join the hermits in singing their prayer "*Three are Ye, three are we, have mercy on upon us, Lord.*" They part.

What is the point of Tolstoy's story?

Is this an anti-clerical, anti-ecclesiastic fable, aiming at the very structure of the Church, the body of Christ? Is this a heresy to say that all of the prayers accumulated by the two thousand years of the experience of the Church amount to nothing?

The story illustrates a central aspect of the Eastern Orthodox tradition – that of the *prayer of the heart*, which is beyond words. This is a prayer which does not come from the theological discourse but comes as a response to direct encounter with the Holy Trinity, God Himself in three persons. This is the same tradition that gave birth to Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer, a prayer which is non-liturgical, non-hierarchical, yet is quintessentially Orthodox, for if all of the Gospel, all of the Fathers, all of the 2000 years of Christianity were to be distilled into one short phrase, this would be so: Lord Jesus Chris, Son of God, have mercy on my, a sinner.

So, what does Tolstoy condemn in this story? Does he condemn the rule of prayer, which thousands of the faithful followed for millennia? Does he condemn the prayers written by the Church Fathers along with the unceasing prayers of thousands of monastics? Not in the slightest. Tolstoy condemns empty religiosity, and it indeed deserves every condemnation. This is what Christ Himself condemned when he told His disciples the story of the Pharisee and the Publican. Condemning others for their overt religiosity, however, is easy. Can we find courage and honesty to see ourselves in this Bishop and condemn ourselves of the same superfluous religiosity, whichever form it takes? Christ did not come to give us new religion; he in fact is the end of all religions. And the beginning of this end starts with “Have mercy on us, sinners.”

CAST

Prologue:

The teacher
One Child (solo)
Children's chors

Opera:

The Bishop (*can be sung by the same singer who sings
the part of The Teacher in the Prologue*)

Sailor 1
Sailor 2
Hermit 1
Hermit 2
Hermit 3
Pilgrims' chorus

Prologue

Paul Stetsenko

Allegro ♩ = 100

The musical score is written for piano and consists of 31 measures. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegro' with a quarter note equal to 100 beats per minute. The score is divided into six systems, each with a measure number at the beginning. The first system (measures 1-7) starts with a *ppp* dynamic and includes an octave sign (*8^{va}*) in the bass line. The second system (measures 8-14) begins with a *pp* dynamic. The third system (measures 15-20) starts with a *p* dynamic. The fourth system (measures 21-25) features dynamics of *mp*, *mf*, and *f*. The fifth system (measures 26-30) begins with a *ff* dynamic. The sixth system (measures 31) concludes the piece. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

33 **Moderato** ♩ = 80

ff

Allegro ♩ = 72

Detailed description: This block shows the piano introduction for 'The Teacher'. It consists of two systems of music. The first system (measures 33-36) is in 3/4 time and features a moderate tempo. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth notes, while the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment with triplets. The second system (measures 37-40) is in 6/8 time and features an allegro tempo. The right hand continues the melodic line, and the left hand plays a steady accompaniment. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

37 **The Teacher**

Please, sit my

mp

Detailed description: This block contains the first vocal entry of 'The Teacher'. The vocal line (measures 37-40) is in 6/8 time and begins with the lyrics 'Please, sit my'. The piano accompaniment (measures 37-40) is in 6/8 time and features a moderate tempo. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth notes, and the left hand plays a steady accompaniment. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

44 dears, com - pose your - selves, and then we will be - gin.

Detailed description: This block contains the second vocal entry of 'The Teacher'. The vocal line (measures 44-48) is in 6/8 time and begins with the lyrics 'dears, com - pose your - selves, and then we will be - gin.'. The piano accompaniment (measures 44-48) is in 6/8 time and features a moderate tempo. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth notes, and the left hand plays a steady accompaniment. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

49 Sum - mer is a time of joy and
(Christ - mas)

Detailed description: This block contains the third vocal entry of 'The Teacher'. The vocal line (measures 49-52) is in 6/8 time and begins with the lyrics 'Sum - mer is a time of joy and (Christ - mas)'. The piano accompaniment (measures 49-52) is in 6/8 time and features a moderate tempo. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth notes, and the left hand plays a steady accompaniment. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

53 beau - - ty, let us play!

Detailed description: This block contains the final vocal entry of 'The Teacher'. The vocal line (measures 53-56) is in 6/8 time and begins with the lyrics 'beau - - ty, let us play!'. The piano accompaniment (measures 53-56) is in 6/8 time and features a moderate tempo. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth notes, and the left hand plays a steady accompaniment. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

56

56

59

Sum - mer is the time of joy and beau - ty, let us

59

59

63

play! What my love - ly

63

63

68

chil - dren would you like to learn to - day?

68

68

73

All Children

We want to sing! We

73

73

99 **Moderato** ♩ = 80

do _____ we dream? _____

105 **Andante** ♩ = 100

p Where do we go when we sleep? Where do we go when we sleep?

Moderato ♩ = 80 **Andante** ♩ = 100

One Child

I want to learn how to pray.

Moderato ♩ = 80

The Teacher

To pray? To pray? You _____ al-read-y know _____ how...

122 *p* **Andante** ♩ = 100

O - pen your heart and God will lis - ten.

128 **One Child** **Andante** ♩ = 100 **Allegro** ♩ = 72

(freely) I don't know... Please, tell me how to do it right!

colla voce

133 **The Teacher**

f Be - lov - - - ed child, ___ my litt - - - le one, ___

138

tell ___ me, tell ___ me, what are you thank - ful for?

ff

144

Andantino ♩ = 90

CHORUS

150 All Children

p Thank you for the air we breathe, and thank you for our laugh - ing days, and

how we run and hide, and how we sleep warm in our beds, — safe from night-mares, and the

dread of mon-sters... We are pro - tect - ted safe — from — harm.

Thank you for the love we give, and for the love we get, and all the won-ders of the world.

Thank you for this won - drous world. We thank you for this world.

176 **Andante** ♩ = 100 **Moderato** ♩ = 80
One Child

But I don't know an-y "real" prayers

181 Please, teach us how to pray a "real" prayer,

181 *pp*

186 **All Children**

like grown-ups do. like grown-ups do.

193 **The Teacher**

Would you like to hear a sto - ry? I'll tell a lit - tle_ tale, and then you_ all can_

198 **All Children** *accelerando e crescendo*

say that you know how to pray. Yes, yes, yes! Yes, yes, yes! Yes, yes, yes!

198 *accelerando e crescendo*

Allegro ♩ = 100

The Teacher

207

Once up-on a time and not so long a-go

212

a Bish-op sailed with pil-grims

215

on a ho-ly mis-sion to a shrine.

f

217

220

p

Segue

Scene 1

Pilgrims' Chorus

Pilgrims, sailors, the Bishop

Largo $\text{♩} = 50$

repeat as necessary for the change of scenery

ppp

The piano introduction consists of four measures. The right hand features a series of chords and a melodic line, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The music is in a key with three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature.

5 Andante $\text{♩} = 50$

p

The piano accompaniment for measures 5-8 is in a key with three sharps and common time. The right hand has a steady eighth-note accompaniment, and the left hand has a simple bass line.

The

Measures 9-12 show the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a long rest in measure 9, followed by the word "The" in measure 10. The piano accompaniment continues with the same accompaniment pattern.

13 way of a pil - grim is not to de - part; the

Measures 13-16 continue the vocal and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics "way of a pil - grim is not to de - part; the". The piano accompaniment provides a steady accompaniment.

17 way of a pil - grim is home - ward - bound. To

Measures 17-20 conclude the vocal and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics "way of a pil - grim is home - ward - bound. To". The piano accompaniment provides a steady accompaniment.

21

fol - low Christ, de - ny your-self, take up your cross and fol - low Him, our

25

Sa - vior has com - mand - ed. We

29

pass through the lands which are not our own; we

33

cross the dis - tant riv - ers whose names we do not know. To

37

fol - low Christ, de - ny your-self, take up your cross and fol - low Him, our

41

Sa - vior has com - mand - ed. ed. Be - yond the hor -

46

i - zon our Heav - en - ly Home is call - ing us the faith - ful to

51

u - ni - on un - known. To fol - low Christ, de - ny your-self, take up your cross and

56

fol - low him, our Sa - vior has com - mand - ed.

Segue

Scene 2

Two sailors; the Bishop

Allegro ♩ = 90

SAILOR 1

Piano

Do you think it's true? Do you think it's true?

Are we near the mag - ic is - land?

SAILOR 2

Are we near the Her - mits? I have heard they are three — ho - ly men, friends of —

sail - ors lost at sea or drown - ing in the wa - ters here.

SAILOR 2

I have heard they do not speak and on - ly

The Bishop walks in on the conversation

19

pray.

f

Musical score for measures 19-22. The vocal line has a whole rest. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *f* is present.

23

BISHOP

Friends, please tell me what you mean?

p

Musical score for measures 23-26. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Friends, please tell me what you mean?". The piano accompaniment is marked *p*.

27

Who are these three that you have seen?

Musical score for measures 27-30. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "Who are these three that you have seen?". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar texture.

31

Musical score for measures 31-33, showing the piano accompaniment. It features complex chordal textures in both hands.

34

Allegro con brio ♩ = 100

SAILOR 1

There are three ho - ly her - mits on that

mf

Musical score for measures 34-37. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "There are three ho - ly her - mits on that". The piano accompaniment is marked *mf*.

38

is - land that you see. I know that they are there — be - cause they once saved me.

41

Their beards are long, — their — clothes are tat - tered but they

44

helped me with my ship. They fed me and they cared — for me, then sent me on my way.

47

I asked, "have you — been here long?" It was the

50

on - ly time they spoke. They said this and — on - ly this, "Have mer - cy on us, Lord."

53

55 *Slower, stately* **BISHOP**

This cap-tures my i - mag - in - a - tion.

60

I would like to _ meet them, I would like _ to _ teach them for sal - va - tion of their

64

souls, for sal - va - tion of their souls.

68 **Allegro con brio** ♩ = 100 **SAILOR**

O Bish - op, they _ are _ mute like fish, they

72

nev - er e - ven speak. They sure - ly are not worth your time, they would not un - der - stand your

75 *Slower, stately* **BISHOP**

ho - ly word. Please, take me to the

79

is - land, I will pay you for your trou - ble. I still want to meet these

84

men and help them if I can, and help them if I can.

Largo ♩ = 50

The Bishop is transported to the island

repeat as necessary

Scene 3

Bishop, Three Hermits

Three Hermits

Have

mf *p*

5
mer-cy on us, Lord, have mer - cy, have mer - cy, have mer-cy on us, Lord. Have mer-cy on us, Lord, have

9
(bow to the Bishop) **Bishop**
mer-cy, have mer-cy, have mer-cy on us, Lord. Bless, Fa-ther. I've been called to teach my

15
flock, and this, I do to - day... I see that you are god - ly men. Please tell me how you pray!

The Hermits

Score for 'The Hermits' in B-flat major, 4/4 time. The vocal line begins with the lyrics: "We on - ly know one prayer; we say it ma - ny times a day, it is the on - ly time we speak. We". The piano accompaniment starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Measures 25-31 of 'The Hermits'. The vocal line continues with: "say it in this way: 'Three are Ye; three are we; have mer - cy on us Lord.'" The piano accompaniment features a *ppp* dynamic and includes a fermata over the first measure of this system. The key signature changes to D major (two sharps) and the time signature changes to 3/4.

Measures 32-35 of 'The Hermits'. The piano accompaniment features a *mf* dynamic and consists of a rhythmic eighth-note pattern in both hands. The key signature changes to D major (two sharps) and the time signature changes to 4/4.

Bishop

Score for 'Bishop' in D major (two sharps), 4/4 time. The vocal line begins with the lyrics: "There is a Ho - ly Tri - ni - ty". The piano accompaniment starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features a complex, multi-layered texture with many chords and moving lines in both hands.

42

This much is good and true but this is not the way to pray. Let me teach you how to

The musical score for measures 42-44 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with a quarter rest, followed by a sequence of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. The piano accompaniment starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a complex texture of chords and arpeggiated figures in both hands.


45

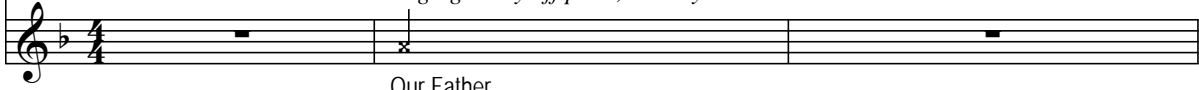
pray the way God says that all men should.

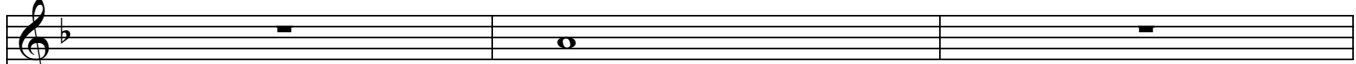
The musical score for measures 45-49 continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a quarter rest in measure 45, followed by quarter notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. The piano accompaniment continues with dense chordal textures and arpeggiated patterns, concluding with a final chord in measure 49.

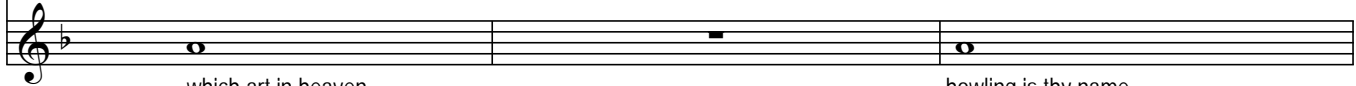
Scene 4

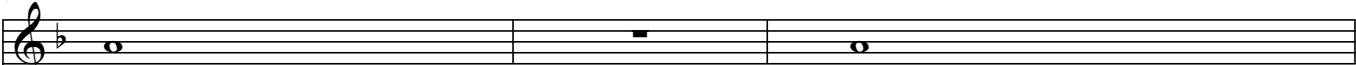
The Bishop, The Hermits


The Bishop 
Our Father... *singing badly off pitch, nasally.* which art in heaven...

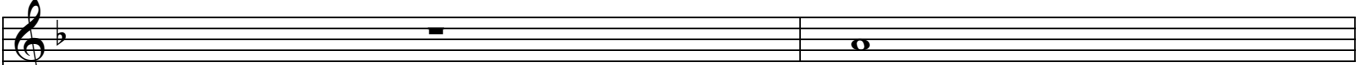
Three Hermits 
Our Father...

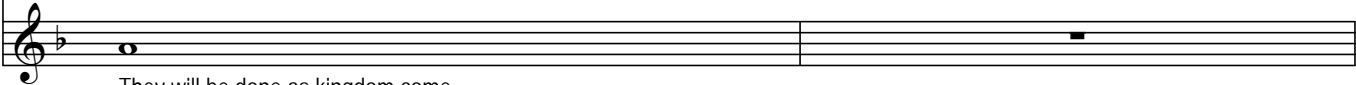
4
Bishop 
hallowed be thy name...

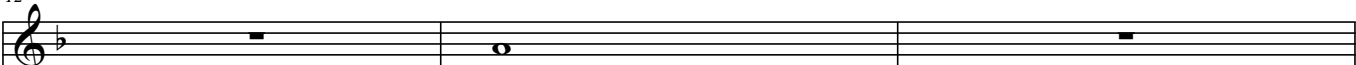
Hermits 
which art in heaven... howling is thy name...


7
Bishop 
not "howling" but "hallowed"! Thy kingdom come, thy will be done...

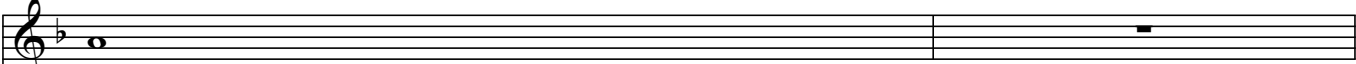
Hermits 
"Hallowed..."

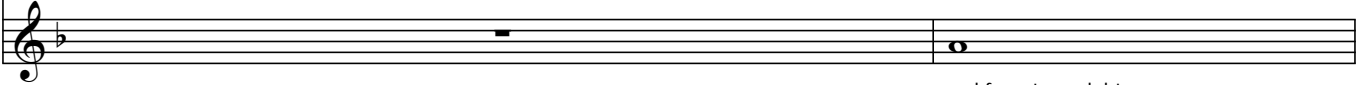
10
Bishop 
On earth as it is in heaven...

Hermits 
They will be done as kingdom come...

12
Bishop 
Give us this day our daily bread...

Hermits 
and earth, it is in heaven... Give us this bread our daily day...

15
Bishop 
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors...

Hermits 
and forget our debtors...

17

Bishop

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.

Hermits

19

Bishop

A - men. Bless you. You are bet - ter

Hermits

A - men.

Pno.

22

Bishop

now. Go pray as I have taught.

Pno.

25

Bishop

Pno.

The Hermits bow and softly sing:

28
Hermits *p*
Three are ye; three are we; have
Pno. *p*

32
Hermits
mer cy on us; have mer - cy on us Three are ye;
Pno.

35
Hermits
three are we; have mer - cy on us, have mer - cy on us.
Pno.

38
Pno.

The Bishop departs from the island

Largo ♩ = 50

41
Pno. *ppp*

Scene 5

Bishop, pilgrims, sailors

Andante $\text{♩} = 60$

Piano introduction for Scene 5. The music is in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. It features a series of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The tempo is marked 'Andante' with a quarter note equal to 60 beats per minute.

Bishop

5 *p*

O Ho - ly won - der! O bless - ed mir - a - cle!

Musical score for the first vocal line (Bishop). The melody begins on a whole note 'O' and continues with half notes for 'Ho - ly won - der!' and 'O bless - ed mir - a - cle!'. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

9

I feel so blest - - - that I can teach those men.

Musical score for the second vocal line. The melody starts with a whole note 'I' followed by a long phrase 'feel so blest - - - that I can teach those men.' The piano accompaniment continues with chords and a bass line.

13 *mf*

O Ho - ly won - der! O bless - ed mir - a - cle!

Musical score for the third vocal line. The melody begins with a whole note 'O' and continues with half notes for 'Ho - ly won - der!' and 'O bless - ed mir - a - cle!'. The piano accompaniment features chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

17

I am like Jo - nah, who preached in Ni - ne - veh.

21 **Pilgrims, sailors**

O Ho - ly won - der! O bless - ed mir - a - cle!

25

Our ho - ly Fa - ther, we are your faith - ful flock.

(segue to Sailor's "What is that I see?")

Scene 6

Sailor, Pilgrims

Allegro ♩ = 90

Sailor 1

Piano

What is that I see? What is that I see?

Are the hermits walk-ing on wa-ther to-wards us?

Bish-op, can that real-ly be?

f

16 **CHORUS**

What is that we see?

What is that we see? The Her - mits are walk - ing on

wa - - - - ter... Bish - op, can that real - ly be?

The three hermits walk on water towards the ship

VI--

optional cut to m. 42

39

41

--DE

ff

As the Hermints approach, the Bishop looks on in astonishment.
The Hermits reach the ship and bow to the Bishop.

CHORUS

(Pilgrims, Sailors, Bishop)

Andante $\text{♩} = 60$

47

p

O Ho - ly won - der!

53

O bless - ed mir - a - cle! Are they the an - gels

57 *mf*

— who came to A - bra-ham? O Ho - ly won - der! O bless-ed mir - a - cle! Are they the

64 *f*

proph - ets ____ of old, who spoke of Christ? O Ho - ly won - der! O bless-ed mir - a - cle!

71

They are the her - mits, they are just sim - ple men.

SEGUE

FINALE

The Hermits, The Bishop, the pilgrims, and the sailors

Andante ♩ = 120

p

5 Hermit 1

Hermit 2

Please for-give us, Bish - op. Our words all fell a - way.

10 Hermit 3

We can re - mem - ber noth - ing.

14 All three Hermits

Bishop

Please teach us how to pray. To pray? To pray? You al-read-y know_ how...

Allegretto ♩ = 50

ppp

Bishop

O Ho - ly men, don't bow to me. I know your prayer will reach the Lord; please

mf

29

pray for us, the sin - ners.

29

Pilgrims, The Hermits

Three are ye, three are we, have mer - cy up -

34

Bishop

To - day I've learned hu - mil - i - ty; I

34

on us, Lord; please pray for us, the sin - ners.

39

did not teach you a - ny - thing, you can al - read - y pray.

39

Pilgrims, The Hermits

Three are ye, three are we, have

45

mer - cy up - on us, Lord; please pray for us, the sin - ners.

subito p

51

molto crescendo

ff

56

ff *p* *ppp*

Largo ♩ = 50

sub

The Final Chorus

Pilgrims, Sailors, Bishop

Andantino ♩ = 90

64

Prayer is not a learn - ed thing that sets a man a - part; a prayer is like a

69

lit - tle child, a prayer is like a lit - tle child who whisp - ers from the heart.

It's faith that moves the moun-tain high and faith that parts the sea; it's faith that com-forts

79 those in need, it's faith that com-forts those in need, and faith that walks with me.

The Hermits turn around and walk back to the island

84

89 ALL CAST

Three are ye; three are we; have mer-cy on us; have mer-cy on us

93

Three are ye; three are we; have mer-cy on us, have mer-cy on us.

97 *mf*

Ped. -----

100 *mp*

103 *p*

106 *pp* *ppp* **FINE**

-----*

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and save us. Amen.

