

My Beloved, Christos Anesti for a few more days until Holy Ascension!

In our Orthodox Tradition, there are **four major fast periods** throughout the year: the **Nativity Fast** which begins on November 15th, **Great Lent** which begins on Clean Monday, the **Dormition Fast** which begins on August 1st, and the **Holy Apostles Fast** which begins on the Monday after All Saints Sunday (which this year is on June 24th), and ends on June 29th, the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul.

From all the fasts mentioned above, the Holy Apostles Fast is unique. Whereas the other three fasts last a specific number of days, the Holy Apostles Fast varies in length. In some years it can be as long as five weeks and in other years it may only be one or two days. It can even not occur at all! This is because this fast depends on the Sunday of All Saints. Now, the Sunday of All Saints is the first Sunday after Pentecost, which in itself is a movable feast (it is celebrated on a different Sunday every year). Another characteristic of the Holy Apostles Fast, which distinguishes it from the other three, is that this fast is **not as strict**. Fish, wine and oil can be consumed throughout the fast, except on Wednesdays and Fridays which are the only strict fast days. Because we are allowed to eat fish, this fast is also called “**white fast**.”

The origin of the Holy Apostles fast has both a Holy Tradition and a Holy Scripture basis. As the disciples were preparing to leave Jerusalem in order to spread Christ’s message, Holy Tradition tells us they were praying and fasting, asking for God’s help with their endeavor. But in Holy Scripture also, when the disciples were accused by the Pharisees that they were not fasting, the Lord replied on their behalf “**Can the attendants of the Bridegroom mourn while he is still with them? But when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, then they will fast**” (Matthew 9:15). Also praying and fasting is mentioned before Barnabas and Saul left the Church of Antioch, following instructions from the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:3).

To understand the purpose of the Apostles Fast we should remember that both Saints Peter and Paul worked diligently to establish our Lord’s Church. The focus of the Book of Acts is on the ministry of these two saints who preached our Lord “crucified and resurrected,” putting their own lives in peril and finally paying the ultimate price for Christ - St. Paul by getting beheaded and St. Peter by getting crucified. Hence, the Orthodox Church has always acknowledged Saints Peter and Paul **as pillars of the Church**, the **first among the Apostles**, and especially Saint Paul, as a stellar example of what it means to be a missionary.

Therefore, during the Holy Apostles Fast we should honor and remember in prayer the missionaries of our Church - those who following the example of the Holy Apostles work night and day to establish Churches in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, under conditions that are often very difficult. As they may frequently have little food and plenty hardship, we should share in their toils from a distance by limiting the abundance of our table. This period of fasting also reminds us that we too have an obligation to be missionaries for Christ. Jesus may have empowered only the Holy Apostles when He said “**...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...**” (Matthew 28:19), but He has asked all of us to be His witnesses when He said “**...Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven ...**” (Matthew 10:32).

During the Holy Apostles Fast we should remember that each of us can be a disciple for our Lord through our witness. As St. Peter says, “**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.**” (1 Peter 3:15). So, we should not only pray for our missionaries overseas, but we should also pray and beseech the Lord that we may also be alert and ready to share the joy of our faith with others. All around us are people who need Christ: our families, our friends, our neighbors, the people we work with. Through our witness, not only is our own faith strengthened, but also the salvation of others can be realized. It is our very witness that transforms us into Christ’s light into the world “**... so people may see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven**” (Matthew 5:16).

With Love in the Risen Christ, Your Parish Priest, Fr. Gregory

