

## **The Apostles and their Fast**

*And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

*James 5.15–16 (ESV)*

*Leaders of the Apostles and teachers of the world, pray to the Master of all to grant peace to the world and great mercy to our souls.*

*Troparion*

*Thou hast taken the firm and divinely inspired Preachers, O Lord, the leading Apostles, for the enjoyment of Thy blessings and for repose. For Thou hast accepted their labours and death as above every burnt offering, O Thou Who alone knowest the secrets of our hearts.*

*Kontakion*

Coming from a different tradition, I had not heard of the Apostles' Fast until encountering Orthodoxy. Yet it is an ancient practice, written about by Ss Athanasius and Ambrose. It has always been connected to Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the Disciples in Power (Ac 2). The conclusion of the fast is tied in with the commemoration of the martyrdom of Ss Peter and Paul on June 29.

## **The Apostles**

After relating Pentecost, The Book of Acts focuses on Ss Peter and Paul. These men were used mightily by God to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28.19). St Peter was given a revelation that the message of our Lord Jesus was to be given to the Gentiles, and saw the first Gentile convert, St Cornelius the Centurion (Acts 10). St Paul made several missionary journeys to the Gentiles and wrote half of the books of the New Testament. Tradition tells us they were both martyred under Emperor Nero in Rome, Paul by beheading (as he was a Roman citizen) and Peter by crucifixion upside-down (as he considered himself not worthy to die in the same manner as our Lord). Tradition tells us of how the Holy Spirit empowered the other Apostles preaching in and out of the Roman empire with some going as far as India (St Thomas) and Ethiopia (St Matthew).

## **The Fast**

An interesting facet of Ss Peter and Paul is that they both repented deeply. All four Gospel accounts relate that St Peter thrice denied our Lord during his passion (Mt 26, Mk 14, Lk 22–23, Jn 13). The beautiful epilogue of the Gospel according to St John (21) shows us Peter's repentance and restoration by Jesus Christ. St Paul persecuted the Church and participated in the martyrdom of St Stephen (Ac 7.54 ff.) before Christ encountered him on the road to Damascus (Ac 9). After his baptism he spent many years in the wilderness repenting and learning from Christ (Gal 1.17-18). He gave us that profound line we repeat in every Divine Liturgy, "Christ ... didst come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first." (1 Tm 1.15)

The source of the Apostles' power was Christ, which they obtained through faith and repentance. We cannot enter into the life of Christ without repentance. We must renounce our own works and wisdom (Prv 3.5). Therefore, let us emulate the Apostles by repenting, by fasting, and by confessing our sins, so we may be used by Christ to accomplish his work.

*O Son of God, Who art wondrous in the saints, save us who sing to Thee. Alleluia.*