

What is the Apostles' Fast?



The Apostles' Fast is one of two "lesser" fasts Orthodox observe, the other being the so-called "Christmas Lent" during the forty days before the Feast of the Nativity.

In America the Fast of the Apostles is probably the least well known, but is among the oldest of Christian traditions. **It is mentioned by St. Athanasius in the fourth century** (see <http://orthochristian.com/62494.html>), and there are other testimonies to its existence very early in the history of the Church. The fast begins on the day after the observance of All Saints' Sunday, which falls one week after Pentecost.

In current practice, **the fast ends with the observance of the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, which is held on June 29**. In earliest practice, however, the fast was probably not connected with the Feast of Peter and Paul. Rather, it was a time for fasting after the celebration of Pentecost and/or All Saints. Apparently, different traditions prescribed different lengths of the fast—whether for one week, several weeks, or even only one day. Today, the fast still has a variable length because of its connection to the date of Pentecost, and therefore of All Saints. For those churches which follow the Old Calendar, the Fast can be very long (as long as 42 days) or very short (8 days), depending upon when Holy Pascha falls. For Orthodox churches which use the New Calendar, there are some years in which there is no Apostles' Fast at all.

For faithful Orthodox today, the Fast of the Apostles can be an occasion for reflection upon the lives and example of the Holy Apostles. Following Jesus' admonition recorded by St. Matthew (10:32-33, 37-38, 19:27-30), the Apostles left behind their parents, their children, and their possessions in order to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to people who did not know Him. **Christian missionaries around the world are still doing this today**. During the Fast of the Apostles we are reminded to pray for them all, and for Orthodox mission everywhere.

The Fast is also an occasion to remember that **in Christ, we have a unity that goes far beyond our personal opinions, likes or dislikes**. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that the Apostles themselves recognized this very early. The occasion was an

argument which took place regarding whether the followers of Christ needed to continue to observe the Law of Moses. At first, Peter and Paul took different sides in the discussion. Paul even says that he opposed Peter to his face (Galatians 2:11 ff.). To resolve the question, a council was called in Jerusalem, and after some discussion the Apostles and Elders, discerning in and by the Spirit, agreed that Gentile Christians did not need to observe practices like circumcision and the complex dietary laws given in the Books of Moses in order to be full members of the New Covenant Church.

These events remind us **to seek God when we have disagreements within the Church**. This requires humility on our part, and the willingness to accept others even when we might not have agreed with them before. We let go of our own personal wishes or demands, and pray for the good of the Church and for a recognition of the will of God for all of us together.

At the conclusion of the Fast, therefore, we celebrate Peter and Paul together. The icon of the Feast depicts the two men standing side-by-side, holding the Church together in their hands. This is a powerful symbol of the supernatural love for one another which is given by the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Spirit we have agreement and new life. For this reason, Orthodox Christians today can regard the Fast of the Apostles as one of the most important times of the year, **a time to humble ourselves and pray for genuine love and unity in the Church around the world**.



Adapted from <http://myocn.net/what-is-the-fast-of-the-apostles/>

