

Apostles Fast

Contributed by H.G. Bishop Youssef
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May the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

On the Fifth of Epep we celebrate the "Feast of the Apostles." In preparation for this feast I would like to share some thoughts concerning the apostles and the establishment of the early church. It is my prayer that all will draw closer to God, to an understanding of the apostles, and to those who received instruction from disciples of the apostles.

"And He appointed twelve, whom He also named APOSTLES, to be with Him and to be sent out..." (Mark 3:14).

The twelve apostles formed the inner core of the Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. They were personally chosen by the Lord Himself, had the power of working miracles, and were inspired to teach and to do extraordinary mission work. On the Feast of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came down on the apostles and they became great, giving witness with the power of the life and death and the resurrection of Jesus as He declared they should.

"When the Bridegroom shall be taken from them.....then they shall fast" (Matthew 9:15). The Apostles' Fast is the oldest fast and the first one kept by the Christian Church. During the Apostles' Fast, the Holy Spirit spoke to them, "As they ministered to the Lord and FASTED the Holy Spirit said separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2-3).

The apostles served the Lord Jesus and later provided leadership to the first generation Christian believers. They were of such importance that the word "apostle" occurs approximately seventy-nine times in the New Testament. Acts of the Apostles portrays the apostles as leaders of the first church in Jerusalem during the Church's first decade. The apostles truly established the church and with their fast we contemplate the glory of God, their faith, and hardships in which they overcame.

"Apostolic Fathers" is a collection of early Christian writings, written around AD 90 to the last third of the second century. It is a discourse from early church leaders over nearly a hundred years. The "Apostolic Fathers" is not a single collection of writings but a selection of writings that relates to practical problems that emerged with the development of individual church communities in the first and second century. Such problems encompassed the meaning of Christianity, appropriate Christian lifestyle, authority for disputes, and establishing tradition.

The works written within the "Apostolic Fathers" include:

- Clement - Letter
- Polycarp - Letter
- Letter to Diognetus - In defense of the Christian faith
- Shepherd of Hermas - Direct revelations of eternal truths by Divine Figures (literary style similar to Revelation)
- Didache - Manual to instruct new converts to the faith and to direct community leaders in their work
- Letter of Barnabas - Views of early Christian authors in Egypt
- Letters of Ignatius/Polycarp - Development of early Christian doctrine in Asia Minor

I would like to share with you one of the most passionate of these works, "Letter of Ignatius to the Romans." This is an authentic ancient letter with versions in both Coptic and Arabic. With the threat of impending martyrdom, St Ignatius is being escorted by soldiers from the city of Antioch to the capital at Rome. St Ignatius role of bishop led to his arrest. This is considered the Holy of Holies and an excerpt from the letter reads to the Romans' as follows:

"I am writing to all the churches and am insisting to everyone that I die for God of my own free will--unless you hinder me. I implore you: do not be "unseasonably kind" to me. Let me be food for the wild beasts, through whom I can reach God. I am God's wheat, and I am being ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I might prove to be pure bread. Better yet, coax the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb and leave nothing of my body behind, lest I become a burden to someone once I have fallen asleep. Then I will truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world will no longer see my body. Pray to the Lord on my behalf, that through these instruments I may be a sacrifice to God. I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul; they were apostles, I am a convict; they were free, but I am even now still a slave....."
(Lightfoot and Harmer, 1989, p.103)

With thoughts of these great men, God's inspiration in them, and the twelve who led the way, let us contemplate in awe of the APOSTLES.

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