

The Apostle's Fast

Excerpted from an article on the St. Nino Orthodox Church website

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Holy Spirit has Descended! From Heaven to Earth! After celebrating the Great Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Church grants us a 'fast-free' week as we contemplate the joy of receiving the Holy Spirit with the Apostles and Disciples. One week from the Monday after Pentecost, we begin the Apostle's Fast, one of the four fasting seasons of the year. The following are some excerpts about the history of the Apostle's Fast to help guide us in this time:

The fast of the Holy Apostles is very ancient, dating back to the first centuries of Christianity. In his letter to Emperor Constance, St. Athanasius the Great (†373) writes: *"During the week following Pentecost, the people who observed the fast went out to the cemetery to pray."*

"The Lord so ordained it," says St. Ambrose (†397), *"that as we have participated in his sufferings during the Forty Days, so we should also rejoice in his Resurrection during the season of Pentecost. We do not fast during the season of Pentecost, since our Lord Himself was present amongst us during those days ... Christ's presence was like nourishing food for the Christians. So too, during Pentecost, we feed on the Lord who is present among us. On the days following his ascension into heaven, however, we again fast."*

St. Leo the Great (†461) says: *"After the long feast of Pentecost, fasting is especially necessary to purify our thoughts and render us worthy to receive the Gifts of the Holy Spirit ... Therefore, the salutary custom was established of fasting after the joyful days during which we celebrated the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, and the coming of the Holy Spirit."*

St. Symeon of Thessalonica (†1429) explains the purpose of this fast in this manner: *"The Fast of the Apostles is justly established in their honor, for through them we have received numerous benefits and for us they are exemplars and teachers of the fast ... For one week after the descent of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Apostolic Constitution composed by Clement, we celebrate, and then during the following week, we fast in honor of the Apostles."*

Keeping the fasts that the Holy Church has handed down to us is a way of practicing our Orthodox Faith and demonstrating our obedience to God. It is a way to strengthen our spiritual life and help us in the ongoing struggle against the passions. In our modern times, the individual will of each person is elevated to almost 'godlike' status. Many people today take great pride in not submitting to anyone or anything, thinking that by doing whatever they want, whenever they want it will bring them freedom, peace and happiness. However, the Lord told us that "...You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free." He also instructed us to pray the "Our Father" as a

model of prayer. Remember the lines “Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.” Our goal as followers of Christ is to do God’s will, not our own will.

When we give up a little bit of our own will by observing the fasting times, it helps strengthen our ability to obey God’s will through the Holy Church that He has given us. Saying ‘no’ to meat and dairy products puts the higher part of our will into action, when our stomach tries to push us to satisfy itself. May our Lord grant us His great mercy as we begin the season of the Apostle’s Fast, that we too may be blessed to fulfill His Holy Will as those first Apostles and Disciples did. Glory be to God!