

Apostles Fast

The Holy, Glorious, And All Praised Leaders Of The Apostles, Peter And Paul



In general, I think it is safe to say that people tend to view themselves as having rights and duties. Some tend to feel more that they have a right to things. Others see themselves more in having the duty to provide. This can have a significant effect on how they behave. While we all have some rights and some duties, some of us focus more on one than the other.

The sense of having the right to have or do something can come in many forms, for example:

- A teenager feeling they have the right to do whatever they like without bearing the consequences.
- A disabled person feels they have the right to support so they have a decent quality of life.
- A manager feels they have the right to speak unpleasantly to their staff.
- A person crossing a field feels they have the right to do so in order to get to the other side.

People often use 'rights' as a justification for their actions and those with a higher sense of rights as opposed to duties, can display tendencies to being more selfish.

Those with a sense of duty feel obliged to act in certain ways and that they will be wrong and bad if they do not do this.

A sense of duty can include actions such as:

- A parent working long hours to earn money to support their family.
- A soldier running into enemy gunfire as they seek to protect their country.
- A leader who feels it is important to be open and honest with employees about upcoming change.

Those with a greater sense of duty are often the 'givers' in life with more concern for others.

This Monday we begin the Apostles Fast (this year for only 24hrs!). I wonder how you feel about fasting. Do you approach fasting with a sense of have your 'rights' – "I might fast. I will see how I feel. Afterall, we have free will and I have a right to do what I feel is required". Or do you feel it is your duty to fast. Or do you feel fasting is a 'duty'? The services, practices, and calendars of the Orthodox Church can be hard for people to understand. Some will use their confusion or exercise their rights as an excuse to disregard them and, in doing so, will suffer spiritually as a result.

The Apostles Fast, one of the most ancient fasting periods in the Church. The Sunday of All Saints comes a week after Pentecost, reminding us that we are all enabled to share in the holiness of God by the active presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. But in order to do that, we have to become like our Lord's apostles, who left behind their nets in order to become fishers of

men. Sts. Peter and Paul, along with all the disciples except John the evangelist, died as martyrs, making the ultimate witness for the Saviour's victory over death. They were prepared to do so by decades of self-denial in putting God first in their lives. They left all that was comfortable and familiar to obey the command of the Lord "Come follow Me." They had Love for our Lord and a real sense of 'duty. If we are to develop the spiritual strength and maturity necessary to respond faithfully to our Lords will for us, we must also die to self and gain a measure of freedom from the nets in which we are entangled, whatever they may be.

The Apostles Fast itself fulfils that which our Lord said in response to the question about why His disciples did not fast during His earthly ministry: *"How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."* (Matt. 9:15)

Forty days after his resurrection Christ ascended into heaven and sent the Lord, the Holy Spirit to His followers at Pentecost. Now, after celebrating Pentecost, we fast in order to humble ourselves before God and to fight our passions. This will help us gain the spiritual strength that we see Sts. Peter and Paul, and in all the Holy Apostles. Like them, we want to hear and respond to Christ's command to us, whatever it may be. We want to be able to turn aside from distractions, obsessions, and habits that hold us back from living the lives to which our Lord calls us.

Sadly, some believe that by attending and being present in a church service we have done our duty. As Orthodox Christians, we know that we should attend the Divine Liturgy and major feast days whenever possible. But attending the services is only the beginning of our journey. God calls us to participate fully in the heavenly liturgy every day, every moment, with every thought, word, and deed, regardless of where we are. That is why we must all devote time and energy each day of our lives to prayer in a regular, disciplined way if we want to become faithful Christians. It is why even a few minutes of Bible reading, studying the life of a saint, other spiritual reading, or listening to recordings of Orthodox chant is so important for us all. Unless we cultivate a regular habit of prayer and of focusing on the things of God in our daily lives, we will have little hope of hearing, let alone responding faithfully to, our Lord's calling.

And so, let us together all take advantage of this brief Apostles Fast to humble ourselves before the Lord and devote ourselves to prayer and fasting in ways appropriate to our health, age, and life circumstance. Let us all leave the nets of our spiritual laziness and other excuses behind. Let us together endeavour to cultivate a little of that spirituality and devotion that shines so brightly in Sts. Peter and Paul and all the other Holy Apostles, saints, and martyrs.

Our Lord is calling each of us to serve Him in some way. The only the question is whether we have the ears to hear and the spiritual strength to fulfil our Christian duty to our lover, our maker and our keeper.

