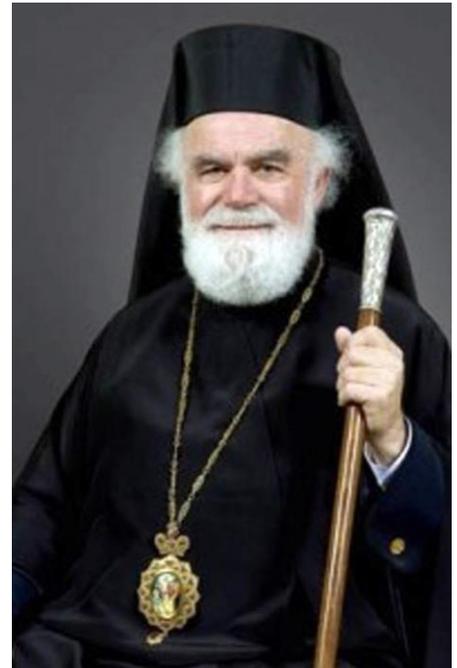


My Beloved Ones,

Beginning after last week's celebration of Sunday of All Saints, we have now entered a new Lenten period. For some, the summer months suggest freedom to go where we please and to eat what we please. Perhaps this, then, is the reason that many Orthodox Christians in America are less familiar with the Apostles Fast than other fasting periods. Another reason, however, is the flexible period of the Fast, which lasts from the Monday that follows the Sunday of All Saints, until the feast of Ss. Peter and Paul, on June 29th. Since the date of Sunday of All-Saints is dependent upon the date of Pentecost, and Pascha, this feast can be as short as a few days, or as long as a month.

What, some may ask, is the purpose of this Fast? Let us consider that every feast is interconnected. From the glorious feast of the Resurrection, we have celebrated Christ's Ascension into Heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit onto the earthly Church, and all its saints. It therefore stands that, as we have honored the saints, we are now taking the time to honor the Apostles; those men who were the first to hear, and to answer the call of our Lord.



This Sunday's Gospel demonstrates this dedication. Christ finds His first Disciples working by the Sea of Galilee. He sees Simon Peter and Peter's brother Andrew, casting their fishing nets into the water. Our Lord and Savior does not make a great speech—He simply and beautifully says, *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."* (Matthew 4:19) It is one of the great mysteries of our Lord's ministry made manifest: how His presence affected these who encountered God in the Flesh. Not only do these laborers give up their work to follow the God-Man, moments later, Jesus and His first two Disciples encounter James and John working alongside their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Like their fellow fishermen, they recognize something amazing and holy in this Man—and leave their own father to follow Him.

Let us truly consider the depths of their sacrifice. These were not educated men; they were merely fishermen with the love of God written on their hearts. Something simply called out to their souls, encouraging them to leave all they have ever known. Their journey took them to the far ends of the earth—with some even witnessing for Christ as martyrs.

I hope and pray, that as we continue to enjoy the blessed opportunities our Creator gives us during this beautiful season, that we also take the time observe the appropriate spirit of prayer, contemplation and humility, which our Lord's closest friends and followers deserve, especially as they are our friends and our role models.

+ALEXIOS

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