

The Feast of the Apostles

Suffering in Evangelism

Celebrating the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul

Each year on the 5th of Epep, our Church celebrates this feast, which marks the conclusion of the Apostles' Fast. Throughout this fast, we are reminded that the apostolic life is not reserved only for the Twelve or the Seventy, but is a calling extended to all believers. We are all called to bear witness to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and to suffer for the sake of His name. St. Paul the Apostle, whose martyrdom we commemorate today, stands as the ultimate model of an evangelist who fully embraced this cross-bearing, yet privileged, calling to suffer for Christ.

When St. Paul was first called, suffering was already part of God's plan for his life. Saul, before becoming Paul, was persecuting Christians. However, on the road to Damascus, Saul encountered Christ. Following this encounter, the Lord said to Ananias in a vision: *"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name"* ([Acts 9:15–16](#)). Before St. Paul even fully understood his purpose and the new path that lay ahead of him, Christ had already revealed that his ministry would be marked by suffering.

St. Paul's apostolic ministry quickly proved the truth of these words. Throughout his service, he endured countless hardships for the sake of Christ. He was beaten, imprisoned, shipwrecked, stoned, exposed to dangers from rivers, robbers, his own people, and the sea, and often suffered hunger and thirst ([2 Corinthians 11:23–28](#)). Yet despite enduring these afflictions, he never ceased preaching the Gospel or carrying out God's will. As Saint John Chrysostom writes while commenting on St. Paul's calling: "For the preaching of the word was to be with much tribulation, and with dangers without number." (Homilies on Acts of the Apostles)

Through these sufferings, St. Paul demonstrated that proclaiming Christ faithfully often requires sacrifice and perseverance. His life reminds us that as Christians, we should not be surprised when trials arise, for standing firm in our faith and choosing the narrow path, even when difficult, becomes an opportunity to bear witness to Christ in our daily lives. Yet St. Paul teaches us that such suffering is not merely something to endure, but a privilege granted to those who belong to Christ. As he writes in [Philippians 1:29](#): *"For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake."* For St. Paul, suffering for Christ was never a punishment, but rather a gift that allowed him to share more deeply in the very life, sacrifice, and path that Christ Himself walked.

Saint Athanasius of Alexandria reminds us of concerning Christian endurance: *"The more the persecutors afflict them, the more they increase in number and strength."* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Ser. II, Vol. IV) St. Paul's life perfectly demonstrated this reality: the more he suffered, the more the Gospel spread through him. As Fr. Matta El Meskeen writes in The Communion of Love ; "It would no longer be an agony but a communion in glory, as St. Paul discovered: 'If we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him' ([Rom. 8:17](#)).'" (The Communion of Love, Chapter: Resurrection and Redemption in the Orthodox Concept, p. 148)

As we celebrate the Feast of the Apostles, St. Paul reminds us that his calling is also our calling. Bearing witness to Christ is not reserved for a select few, it is the calling of every Christian. Although we may never face the imprisonments, stoning, shipwrecks, or persecutions that St. Paul endured, we must still be prepared to bear witness to Christ in our daily lives, even when it requires sacrifice and suffering for His sake. As Pope Shenouda III teaches: "The cross is not merely suffering. It is suffering accepted with joy for the sake of God." (The Release of the Spirit, Chapter 3)

Every time we suffer for Christ, we are given an opportunity to grow closer to Him, take up our own crosses, and walk faithfully beside Him.

May the prayers of St. Paul the Apostle and all the holy apostles strengthen us, reaffirm our purpose, and grant us endurance as we face the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

Resources

- *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version
- [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Ser. I, Volume 11, Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, Homily 20 \(Commentary on Acts 9:15–16\)](#)
- [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Ser. II, Vol. IV: Apology to the Emperor. \(Apologia Ad Constantium.\): The irruption of Syrianus.](#)
- The Communion of Love, p. 148 (English Edition)
- The Release of the Spirit, Chapter 3