



Orthodox Parish of St Martin & St Helen Colchester

SERIES 2 NO 7 | JULY 2023

The Apostles Fast

Each year, one week after Pentecost we arrive at the Apostles Fast. This fast varies in length, depending on the date of Pentecost and always ends on June 28, the eve of the Feast of the Holy and All-Praised Leaders of the Apostles, Peter and Paul. This fast is very ancient and can be traced back to the early years of the church. Both St Athanasius the Great (+373) and St Ambrose (+397) mention it in their writings and we read the following in the fourth century Apostolic Constitutions: *“And you after celebrating Pentecost, feast one week, then start fasting, because it is necessary that we rejoice with the gift granted to us from God (the Holy Spirit), to fast after rejoicing.”* We see from this canon that, originally the fast had started a week after Pentecost and lasted itself for only one week, but later on in around the third century, it became linked to the Feast of the Great Apostles, instituted as the commemoration of their martyrdom and deaths became more developed. Thus it becomes a fast in preparation of *their* feast. St. Symeon of Thessalonica (+1429) explains: *“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.”* Those outside the Orthodox Faith may look at this ancient practice, part of our precious Holy Tradition, and wonder why, so many centuries later, we preserve it so carefully. The answer of course, is that our Orthodox fasting is not some dusty legalistic observance done for its own sake, nor is it simply a commemoration or memorial, in this case for those great apostles. Fasting is an indispensable weapon in our armoury with which to fight against



the passions and against the spiritual enemies that seek to do us evil. It is not some quaint dietary curiosity but a dynamic ascetical discipline to help bring our minds and bodies under control so that we may rightly order our often badly disordered lives towards God. As St Isaac the Syrian wrote: *“As soon as the devil sees someone possessed of this weapon (fasting), fear straightway falls on this adversary and tormentor of ours, who remembers and thinks of his defeat by the Saviour in the wilderness; his strength is at once destroyed and the sight of the weapon given us by our Supreme Leader burns him up”* Let us fast then with joy and gratitude for the faithful preservation of this important element of our spiritual lives!

Father Mark

Regular Service Times

Saturdays: Great Vespers 4:30 pm St Martin’s Church
Sundays: Matins & Holy Liturgy from 9:45 am St Martins Church

Services for July 2023

Wednesday 5 July Holy Liturgy: St Athanasius, Founder of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos and his disciples - 9.30am St Helen's Chapel

Thursday 13 July Holy Liturgy: Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel - 9.30 St Helen's Chapel

Thursday 20 July Holy Liturgy: Holy Glorious Prophet Elijah - 9.30 St Helen's Chapel

Confessions

Father Alexander: from 5pm after Vespers or by arrangement |
Father Mark by arrangement

Holy Marriage, Holy Baptism, funerals, memorials etc by arrangement

News and updates of the month:

On the Feast of Ascension we were delighted to welcome a distinguished guest from the USA. The Very Rev. Archpriest Andrew Stephen Damick is Chief Content Manager at Ancient Faith Ministries, an organisation which does so much to bring the Orthodox Faith to people all over the world. Father Andrew spent time during his trip to the UK with Father Alexander and Father Mark discussing the many wonderful Saints of Essex and visited both temples. We venerated with him, our relics of the True Cross and St Helen and told him of the wonderful histories connecting St Helen and St Constantine the Great with our hometown of Colchester. We wish him every success in all his endeavours!



Foodbank Collection: there is a box in St Martin's for items to be donated to Colchester Foodbank, please check the sign on the box for suitable items.

Study Sessions: Introduction to Holy Orthodoxy: Faith and Life: Father Mark will be holding fortnightly study sessions for catechumens and those interested in learning more about our ancient faith.

Next session taking place in July:

Sunday 02/07: The Symbol of Faith (Creed)

Sunday 09/07: Holy Tradition & Holy Scripture

+ **SUMMER BREAK** +

Sunday 30/07: Customs & 'small t' traditions

<http://www.orthodoxcolchester.org.uk/hm/catechesis-teaching/>

We are delighted to announce that work on our iconostasis will commence, God willing, in early July. We have now received the necessary permission from the city planners for our design. We will soon also announce details of how the beautiful icons we have commissioned will be funded.

A word from the Fathers: St Nektarios of Aegina, Path to Happiness, 1. "How mistaken are those people who seek happiness outside of themselves, in foreign lands and journeys, in riches and glory, in great possessions and pleasures, in diversions and vain things, which have a bitter end! In the same thing to construct the tower of happiness outside of ourselves as it is to build a house in a place that is consistently shaken by earthquakes. Happiness is found within ourselves, and blessed is the man who has understood this. Happiness is a pure heart, for such a heart becomes the throne of God. Thus says Christ of those who have pure hearts: "I will visit them, and will walk in them, and I will be a God to them, and they will be my people." (II Cor. 6:16). What can be lacking to them? Nothing, nothing at all! For they have the greatest good in their hearts: God Himself!"

Saint Sisoes the Great of Egypt

Saint Sisoes the Great (+429), renowned among the ascetics of Egypt, was a fourth-century solitary monk pursuing asceticism in the Egyptian desert. After the death of Saint Anthony the Great, he left Scete to live in Saint Anthony's cave; he is known for saying this: "Thus in the cave of a lion, a fox makes his dwelling."

Extremely strict with himself, he was very merciful and compassionate to others, and he received everyone with love. To those visiting him, he always taught them humility, when he was asked how to do this he replied: "When a man learns to regard every man as better than himself, he thus acquires humility". Saint Sisoes attained such spiritual purity that he was granted the gift of wonderworking so that by his prayers he once restored a dead child back to life. Asked by the monks whether one year is sufficient for repentance if a brother sins, Abba Sisoes said: "I trust in the mercy of God that if such a man repents with all his heart, then God will accept his repentance in three days."

When Saint Sisoes was at the end of his long life of labours, as the disciples were gathered around him, his face began to shine, and he said: "Behold, Abba Anthony is coming"; then: "Behold, the choir of the Prophets is coming"; his face shone yet more brightly and he said: "Behold, the choir of the Apostles is coming". He then seemed to be talking with someone and when he was asked about it, in his humility, he said he was asking the Angels for time to repent. Finally, his face became as bright as the sun and he said: "Behold, the Lord is coming, and He says 'Bring me the vessel of the desert.'" As he gave up his soul into the hands of God, there was a flash of light and a sweet fragrance in the room.

Saint Sisoes, pray for us all!

Also in July: Saint Mildred (+732), after the death of her mother, St Ermenburga, she became abbess. The present Minister Abbey in Kent is a house which contains parts of the old Saxon Abbey as well as a relict of St Mildred - it is now occupied by Benedictine nuns.



St Martin's Church, West Stockwell Street, CO1 1HN
St Helen's Chapel, Maidenburgh Street, CO1 1UB

Both temples are off the High Street, but accessible from there only on foot. Nearest car park NCP Nunn's Road, CO1 1EJ.

Confessions: Saturdays 5pm, after Vespers or by arrangement.

Holy Marriage, Holy Baptism, Funerals, Memorials etc: by arrangement.

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We are grateful to those continuing to support our church by regular or occasional gifts: God bless you.

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