

THE TWELVE APOSTLES



The word *Apostle* is a Greek word, and it means one "who is sent forth," having been entrusted with a special mission.

It is related in the Gospels that from the beginning of His ministry our Lord called some twelve men and gave them intensive training for a specific office, in which authority and duty were joined. He named them Apostles.

The Apostles were to be with Jesus while He was on earth, to aid Him in the preaching and in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The mission of the Apostles is summarized in the following words of instruction, which our Lord gave them before His Ascension into heaven: "All power is given to me, in heaven and on earth. As the Father has sent me, I also *send* you. Go ye therefore, and *make disciples* of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:18-20).

The Apostles' lives were a constant exercise of this last instruction. Wherever they went they preached the Gospel with authority, being the authentic witnesses of the life and teachings of our Lord; they established churches wherever they went. Since the authority, with which the Lord empowered the Apostles, was given them not for personal use but for the entire Church, it is natural to assume that this authority should last, and that it should remain in the Church after the death of the Apostles. Therefore, like their Master, the Apostles also selected some people as their successors and transmitted their authority to them. These successors of the Apostles were later called *bishops*. The power of a bishop, in governing and teaching the Church, is essentially the same as the general authority of an Apostle.

The Church has been called "Apostolic," because the mission of the Church is identical with the mission of the Apostles. When we say that our Church is "Apostolic," we mean that the Church of today is identical with the Church which was founded by Jesus Christ and of which the government and the continuation was entrusted to the Apostles. The Apostolicity of a Church is of great importance, because it is the surest sign of the true Church of Christ. *Apostolicity* is one of the four marks of the Church. It contains in itself the other three marks of the Church which are *Unity, Sanctity, and Catholicity*; an Apostolic Church can be only One, Holy and Universal.

The term "*Apostolic Church*," also signifies, in its narrower meaning, those particular ancient Churches which were directly founded, or at least for a while governed, by an Apostle, and which on that account, enjoyed a special dignity. Our Church is "Apostolic" in this sense too. By the term *Apostolic Succession* is meant that the mission conferred by Jesus Christ upon the Apostles passes from them to their legitimate successors, in an unbroken line, until the end of the world. Apostolic Succession ensures the continued identity of the Church.

Let us say a few brief words about each of the twelve Apostles of Christ.

(1) *St. Peter* was the most active figure among the Twelve. His former name was Simon, which Jesus changed into Peter, which is a Greek word meaning "rock." He made the memorable confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" thus he became the first official member of the Church, because the Church was going to be composed of those who would accept our Lord as "Christ" (which means One "whom the Lord has anointed,") and as "Son of God." Although St. Peter had the weakness to deny his Lord when Jesus was arrested, nevertheless he repented, and was later pardoned and was restored to his office as Apostle by Christ. It was he who gave the first Christian sermon on the day of Pentecost. He first preached in Jerusalem; he was imprisoned but miraculously escaped from the prison. He was finally crucified in Rome, head downwards in 67 A.D.

(2) *St. Andrew* was Peter's brother. He was one of the first to follow our Lord as a disciple. He preached in Northern Greece, Epirus and Scythia, and suffered martyrdom in about 70 A.D. on a X-shaped cross, which for that reason is called St. Andrew's Cross.

(3) *St. John* has been called "the beloved Disciple" in the Gospel. He was the one among the Apostles who had the courage to follow Christ to the place of His Crucifixion. He was the only faithful disciple standing at the foot of the Cross on Calvary. St. John became the adopted son of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ, and took good care of her until her death. He went to preach in Asia Minor, and was later banished to an island called Patmos, where he experienced those marvelous visions or revelations which are recorded in the last book of the New Testament, called *the Apocalypse*, or the Book

of Revelation. He also wrote the last Gospel, the Gospel of St. John, and three Epistles. He died at the age of one hundred years by a natural death.

(4) *St. James the Major* was the elder brother of St. John. He was a daring and brave person. For that reason he was the first among the Apostles to be martyred, being beheaded in Jerusalem in the year 44 by King Herod Agrippas (Acts 12:2). The famous St. James' Armenian Monastery of Jerusalem is dedicated to his name. The Sanctuary where his head is buried and where a beautiful church is built, is visited and venerated not only by Armenians but by all Christians who go to Jerusalem as pilgrims or visitors. It is now one of the most important holy places in the Holy City.

(5) *St. Matthew* was probably the only one among the Apostles who was not a fisherman. He was a government official, a tax collector, and perhaps the one Apostle who had a better knowledge of reading and writing. He wrote the first book of the New Testament, the Gospel according to St. Matthew. He preached among the Persians and Parthians, and was martyred in Parthia (present Iran).

(6) *St. Thomas* was famous for his doubts and for his realism. He would not believe in the Resurrection of Christ until he saw, on the hands and feet of Jesus the marks of the Crucifixion. He went as far as India, where he was martyred, pierced with a lance, on a hill which is now called "Mount of St. Thomas" near Madras. He founded the Church of the Christians of St. Thomas in Malabar, South India.

(7) *St. Philip* is the only one among the Apostles who had a Greek name which means "horse lover." Probably he spoke Greek, as it was to him that "certain Greeks came" with the request to be admitted to the presence of Jesus (John 12:20-22). He preached in Asia Minor and was crucified in Hierapolis.

(8) *St. Thaddeus* was the first Apostle to visit Armenia. He preached first in Syria and the upper parts of present day Iraq; he then entered Armenia in 44 A.D., made many converts and was martyred there in 66 A.D.

(9) *St. Bartholomew* was the same as Nathanael, "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" (John 1:47). He was the second Apostle of Armenia. He preached first in Arabia and Persia, and was later martyred in Armenia in 68 A.D. His tomb was venerated by Armenians until 1915 when Armenians were deported by Turks from their homeland. The shrine now is in ruins.

(10) *St. Simon* "The Zealot" preached in North Africa and was martyred in Persia.

(11) *St. James the Lesser* was the son of Alphæus. He preached in Palestine and Egypt and was finally crucified in Lower Egypt.

(12) *St. Matthias* was chosen to take the place of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed the Lord. He preached in Ethiopia and was martyred there.

(13) *St. Paul* was not one of the Twelve, but was converted miraculously one year after the Resurrection of the Lord. Paul was first a persecutor of Christians. His conversion took place as a result of a vision in which he saw Christ bidding him not "to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14), but follow His instructions (Acts chapter 9). Though not of the Twelve, yet among all the Apostles *St. Paul* was the most ardent and diligent laborer. He wrote many Epistles, which we still read in the Church. He is called the Apostle of the Gentiles, because he carried the Gospel to the pagan world. He travelled extensively, and was finally martyred in Rome in 67 A.D.

"Remember your leaders, who preached to you the word of God, consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith . . . do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings" (Heb. 13:7-9). These memorable words have always echoed in the hearts of early Christians as referring to the Apostles, their teaching and life. The members of the early Church had a profound respect for the Apostles when they were living on earth. We must have the same respect; and that is what we show by remembering them on Apostles' Day. The Armenian Church commemorates each Apostle twice in the year; first on the feast of Twelve Apostles, secondly they are celebrated two by two on various Saturdays of the year. Our veneration of their memory should find expression in the devotional reading of the Apostolic writings, that is, the Gospels and the Epistles of the Apostles, in following their instructions, and in imitating their virtues and their devotion to Christ, for the salvation of our souls, for the revival of our Church and for the greater glory of God the Almighty, whose devoted servants they were.