

Celebrating the Church's Apostles

After spending the entire night in prayer to His Father, Jesus selects twelve of his disciples, calling them "apostles." The word *apostle* comes from the Greek *apostolein*, meaning "one who is sent out." By choosing twelve, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel, Jesus indicates that he is establishing a "people," a new People of God, the Church. Thus, the Church is "apostolic" and "missionary" right from its very origins. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that the Church is "missionary by her very nature" (*Ad Gentes 2*).

In the New Testament one finds two primary usages of the word *apostle*. The first specifically refers to the twelve chosen by Jesus; they form the foundation of the Church—with Jesus as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20). The second meaning refers more generically to other individuals who are sent out to be messengers, ambassadors, and missionaries of Jesus Christ. In this *general sense* we can be called "apostles." Indeed, through our Baptism, we are called and sent as genuine apostles of the risen Jesus.

Probably, the closest term to describe an *apostle* today would be the word *missionary*, which, incidentally, derives from the Latin verb *mittere*, meaning "to send." A missionary is a follower of Christ who is sent out with the specific mission of announcing the Gospel. To employ the words of Pope Francis, we all are "missionary disciples," followers of Jesus by whom we have been missioned.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (120), Francis is eminently clear: "In virtue of their Baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples.... Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Jesus Christ: we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries,' but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples.'" On this feast of the Apostles Simon and Jude we joyfully celebrate our missionary identity.