

In 1549 the Calendar of the Book of Common Prayer was drastically purged. The only feasts to be observed were those of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Mary Magdalene, St Stephen, the Holy Innocents and the Apostles and Evangelists – all New Testament Saints. This is perhaps the reason why the feasts of the Apostles – printed in red in some books, and so known as ‘Red Letter Days’ – have held a prominent place in Anglican Devotion.

So it is that in every calendar month except March the Prayer Book Calendar drew our attention to one or more of the Apostles – not only those of whom the New Testament writings tell us much, like Peter and Paul, or rather less, like Andrew and Thomas, but also those of whom we are told nothing but their names, like Bartholomew.

Today’s Saints – Philip and James the Less – fall in the middle of this list. Philip figures in today’s Gospel and in three other events in John’s Gospel. James is sometimes identified with the ‘brother of the Lord’ mentioned several times in the New Testament, and / or with the James who was a leader of the Church in Jerusalem. He is sometimes regarded as the author of the Epistle of James. But none of these identifications is certain.

What the twelve apostles, well-known and all-but unknown, have in common is that they were chosen by Jesus and *appointed so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach* (Mark 3:13). They were to be the foundation of the Church, the patriarchs of the New Israel.

Their feasts are a monthly reminder to us of the twin tasks of all members of the Catholic and Apostolic Church – to be with Jesus and to be sent out to preach (in deed if not in word).

We pray that, recognizing Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life, we may be faithful to our apostolic calling.

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The reason the Western Church observed these two apostles together on 1<sup>st</sup> May is that on this day the Church of the Holy Apostles in Rome was consecrated. According to an ancient inscription it was originally dedicated to Saint Philip & Saint James, and their presumed relics were (are?) venerated there.

In the Eastern Churches they are separately celebrated – James on 9<sup>th</sup> October and Philip on 14<sup>th</sup> November.