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|  | | |  | Ask, Father James:  **What Does the Symbolism of Fish Mean in the Early Church?** |
| After the Ascension, Christians soon found themselves to be the subjects of persecution by both the Romans and the Jews... The Jewish authorities persecuted the church because it threatened to eradicate the religion of their ancestors (Judaism) and the Roman authorities persecuted the church because they wanted to repress it with pagan religion of the Romans.  Caesar Augustus was the reigning Emperor during the time of Jesus. He died in AD 14. His name Caesar Augustus became the title of imperial legitimacy. Augustus and his descendant - successors, Emperors Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius and Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Trianus decius, held power stained with blood of the Christians who they treacherously martyred in intrigues in their attempts to merge  pagan culture into Christianity. They exalted themselves as gods with the title, "dominus" (Lord) and forced Christians to consult and worship the Delphic oracle.  Of course, these Christians resisted and many died for the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.  During these periods of persecution of the early church, it became dangerous to be known as a Christian, Christians developed symbols as codes to recognize other believers. Today, some of those Symbols could be seen drawn as Monograms on priests' vestments and sacred liturgical books and altar decoration linens and on chasubles, Copes, Humeral veils, dalmatics and Albs. Symbols like fish, dove, IHS, ΑΩ, ΧΡ(chi-rho) and ἰχθύς., etc. These were Greek letter alphabets and were used as anagram and acronyms.  For example, the fish was the early Christian symbol of identity. When the Church was under persecution, they disguised the cross and rather used the fish to avoid easy identification. It was called the ἰχθύς symbol and was also used as a code for them to know where to meet to gather celebrate the Mass or the Eucharist. It was also the code to identify oneself as a Christian (brethren) as opposed to an enemy - without either the government or the religious leaders recognizing them. When two strangers met, one of them would draw, on the ground, the upper half of the fish symbol, recognizing the symbol, the stranger would add a second curved line and complete the drawing of a fish. This was in recognition of Christ who called the apostles to become fishers of men, and for the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and finally associated with Christ and the Eucharist (Mk 6:39-45, Mt. 14:15-22, Lk. 9:10-18 and Jn. 6:5-16).  When they were in the dungeons of the catacombs, Fish symbols were drawn on frescoes and on the walls of the catacombs with transliteration of the Greek word IXøY£. When these five letters are used as initials for five first letters that spelled *'Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior*.' This is acrostic for  **I**esous **Ch**ristos **Th**eou **Y**ios **S**oter. |
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