

THE ORTHODOX WEEKLY BULETIN VESTAL, CLIFFWOOD, NEW JERSEY

A SYMBOL WITH SPIRITUAL SIGNIFIANCE

Living as we do in a country where we have always been free to practice our faith openly, it is sometimes difficult for us to relate to the conditions that existed for the members of the early Church. The pagan rulers of the ancient Roman empire were relentless in their attempt ot destroy Christianity. Anyone bold enough to profess their belief in Jesus Christ faced certain torture, humiliation and death. The initial chapers of Church History are filled with stories of the brave people who made the supreme sacrifice of their lives for Christ.

Since their survival was largely dependent upon secrecty, the early Christians began to identify themselves with a SIMPLE MARKING which enabled fellow Christians to recognize one another, yet did nothing to arouse the suspicions of the Roman authorities. This symbol was the FISH. A fish traced in the ground may have indicated a place where other Christians were to meet for worship. Drawing a fish in the dust while conversing with strangers would quickly show if one were in the company of “friend or foe.”

Why did the 2nd century Christians select a fish as their symbol? When the great Theological truth – Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour – was written in it’s original Greek form, they noticed that the first initials formed the word “ichthus.” This happens to be the Greek word for fish! It not only showed who the early Chrisitians were, but more importantly what they believed. A simple drawing had been transformed into something full of spiritual significance.