

THE APOSTLES' SYMBOLS

Peter - Peter was the first leader of the Church. Although he denied the Lord at the time of His arrest, Peter was the first to say that Jesus was "The Christ, the Son of the Living god" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus said to Peter (Matthew 16:19), "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." The keys represent earth and heaven and the power to bind and loose. They depict spiritual authority. Peter was martyred in Rome. It is reported that he asked to be hung upside down on the cross because he felt unworthy to die as Christ did. He requested that the cross be inverted so that he might look heavenward as he was crucified.



Andrew -Andrew was the brother to Peter and a fisherman. He was bound to a cross, rather than nailed, in order to prolong his suffering. Andrew is represented in the cross shaped like an "X" called the *cross solitaire* or *crux decussata* or the *St. Andrew's cross*. The anchor image represents his background as a fisherman and his ardent discipleship, as he followed Jesus' invitation, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of all people" (Matthew 4:18:22).

James the Greater - James the Greater, with his brother John, left his father Zebedee's fishing business to follow Jesus. We can assume that James, John and Peter were closest to Jesus as they



were chosen to accompany Him and witness the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8). James was the first of the Apostles to suffer martyrdom, dying under the sword of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-2). Legend has it that James founded churches in Spain. For over 1,000 years pilgrimages have been made in his name to Santiago de Compostela. The three scallop shells signify pilgrimage; the cross on the shield represents his martyrdom.

John - John was brother to James. The Bible refers to John as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." (John 19:26). John took Mary, Jesus' mother and provided a home for her through the remainder of her life. The serpent drawing comes from a legend that an attempt to poison John was unsuccessful because the poison turned into a serpent that crawled out of the cup. The cup represents the image of Jesus telling John and his brother James that they must drink of the same cup (Mark 10:35-39).



Philip - Philip is symbolized by a staff surmounted by a cross. The staff and cross refer to his successful missionary journeys among the people of Asia where he spread Christianity and the cross of Christ. The loaves of bread recall Philip's remark when Jesus fed the multitude: "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" (John 6:5) Philip also is quoted as asking Jesus, "Show us the Father and we will be satisfied." (John 14:8)



Bartholomew - Bartholomew and Nathanael are held to be the same person about whom the Bible tells very little. Jesus said of him, "Behold, an Israelite in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47)



According to tradition, this apostle won King Polymus of Armenia for Christianity. But, it happened that the brother of the king was so angry at Bartholomew that he had him flayed, crucified with his head downward and then beheaded. The symbol of Bartholomew is three flaying knives referring to his martyrdom.

Thomas -The usual symbol of Thomas is the carpenter's square and a lance or arrow since tradition says he took Christianity to India and built churches with his own hands and skills. His shield represents those churches. The winding image, which can be the yoke of Christ, represents the long road to India. The spear represents his martyrdom at the hands of King Midsa for converting Queen Tertia, his wife, to Christianity. The story more familiar to us is of the "doubting" Thomas, who said: "Unless I see the print of the nails in His hand, and place my finger in the mark of those nails and the wound in His side, I will not believe." (John 20:25)



Matthew - Matthew was the tax collector, Levi, unpopular person because of society's disdain for his occupation. Yet, to Matthew, Jesus says, "Follow me." (Matthew 9:9). The symbols are three money bags, referring to his occupation; and a battle-ax, referring to his martyrdom, which is said to have taken place in Ethiopia, where he was decapitated.



James the Less - James the Less, the son of Alphaeus is called "the Less" because of his small stature. He was a dwarf and shunned in society which had no love for the odd or deformed. Tradition says that at the age of 96 he was thrown from the temple pinnacle by the Pharisees to an infuriated mob, which stoned him



as he prayed to God to forgive them. Someone repeatedly beat his head with a club; hence he is usually represented by a bat or club. The windmill symbol relates perhaps to a legend that James the Less went off to the Low Countries of Europe spreading Christianity. It could also represent the pinnacle of the temple. The blades of the windmill form a cross.

Jude -Jude asks this question: "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" (John 12:22) Tradition has it that Jude traveled with Simon as a missionary. Jude is symbolized by a sailboat with a mast in the shape of a cross referring to his missionary journey and the legend that he carried a cross to many ports of call. In our shield the ship is represented by a nautilus shell, highlighting the spiral form, which symbolized Jude's growth on his spiritual journey to the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13) and also God's promise of eternal life. The sailing mast in the form of a cross is a reminder of his decapitation and martyrdom.



Simon - Simon, a member of the Zealot party, was Bishop of Jerusalem. He is pictured as a fish, referring to his success in fishing for people with the Gospel. He was martyred by decapitation.



Matthias - Matthias replaces the original apostle, Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Jesus. Matthias was elected by the other followers of Jesus by casting lots (Acts 1:15-26) in order to maintain the



number of apostles at twelve - a number representing completion and perfection. The open book of the Bible represents his teaching of the Gospel. The Word of God acts as a two-edged sword (Hebrew 4:12).

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