



Dear People of God,

ICHTHUS is the Greek word for “fish.” Every day Jesus of Nazareth speaks to each of us saying, “Come follow me. And I will make you fishers of men!”

The fish symbol has been a part of Christian iconography for centuries. Yet, many Catholics who see it in Christian art do not know what it means. During Lent, many parish communities enjoy a “Friday Fish Fry” without knowing the profound and ancient meaning of the fish symbol. During Advent and Christmas time, the ICHTHUS symbol is a powerful reminder of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God and the fundamental reason for celebrating Christmas.

In the early Church, this word was used as a “symbol,” an acronym, a word formed from the first letter of words that express the heart of the Christian faith. I. C. H. T. H. U. S. stands for “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior.” This has often been expressed as, “Jesus Christ is the Son of God our Savior.” Thus, with this simple image, or drawing, Christians could profess their faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, especially in times of persecution, suffering, or crises in the Catholic Church.

- I = *Iesous* = Jesus**
- Ch = *Khristos* = Christ**
- Th = *Theou* = God’s**
- U = *Huios* = Son**
- S = *Soter* = Savior**

The sign of the fish in early times was used by Christians as a secret symbol that all who believed that Jesus was the Christ would recognize.

It was scratched on walls and rocks and drawn in the sand. Therefore, as Catholic Christians, you can express the heart of your faith throughout your day by simply praying with one word “I C H T H U S”.

Many people see the fish as a symbol of peace without knowing its ancient meaning. Of course, Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

**The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville**