



Miraculous Catch of Fish and

the

Two foundations of the Catholic
faith at the Sea of Galilee

Rock of Primacy

By Omer Eshel

Early morning at the Sea of Galilee, just before sunrise, the cool breeze and the mist of the waves pat the face of Simon and his friends. They tried to catch fish all night, alas, without success. Simon stares at the Golan Heights as the first glimmers of the morning swell with the rising sun. His heart is full of sorrow. He is well aware that he will not be able to bring food to his family. He turns to his friends and whispers, "Better luck next time, my friends, and let us return to the shore."

With a heavy silence hanging over the small fishing boat, the fishermen return to Tabgha.

As the boat nears the shore, Simon sees a man standing on the shore, waving to him. "Shalom," says the man, "How was it? Have you returned with a boat full of bounty?" Simon does not know nor recognize this man. He returns the man's wave and replies, "Shalom, to you as well. No, the Lord did not bless us this night." The man cries out, "Cast your net ►

◀ to the other side." Simon does as instructed and suddenly the net fills to a point that the little fishing boat almost tips over. Simon calls his friends to help him with the load of the net. They bring 153 fish into the boat. Shocked and amazed that they miraculously now have a load of 153 fish, the men dock next to the man standing on the shore. Simon walks toward the man, and eyes brimming with tears, hugs the stranger and warmly thanks him for his instruction. The stranger smiles and says to him, "Let us celebrate and break bread together." They sit together on a rock along the shore, roast the fish and break bread.

"We know who this stranger is," the friends whisper. "We recognize the kind eyes. We know this is our Rabbi. But how can it be? He was crucified by the Romans not so long ago." They sit in awe and their hearts fill with jubilation in silent recognition of the stranger. The stranger stands, looks at Simon, and asks, "Do you love me?" Simon, knowing now this is not a stranger, recognizing that this is his Rabbi, answers with conviction, "Of course, you know that I do." The stranger smiles and tells him, "Feed my lambs." Then he asks, again, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?" And a tear-filled Simon replies, "Yes, Lord, you know that I do." The stranger provides further instruction, "Feed my sheep."

And a third time, the stranger asks, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?" With a trembling voice, Simon replies, "Yes, Lord, you know that I do." The stranger leans over,



Woman prays inside the church

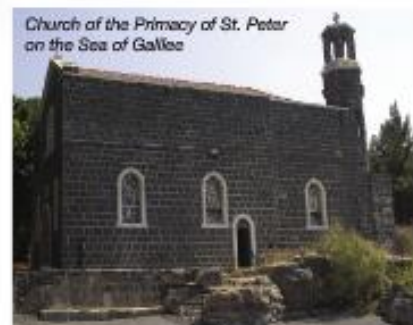
toward Simon, puts his hand on Simon's head and whispers gently, "Feed my sheep." Then the stranger smiles and says to Simon, "You are indeed my rock. You are indeed my Petra. You are indeed my Cephas."

The word Cephas means a foundation rock, a sturdy rock, in Aramaic. During the early days of the Church, the name Cephas was translated into Greek to be known as Petrus or Petra. This story, from John 21, is the prophecy of the role of the Church today. The 153 fish that were brought upon the boat represent the 153 nations known in the Roman world during the first century AD. Today, along the shores of the Sea of Galilee surrounding this very rock, is a beautiful church commemorating this event. The church is built on the foundations of two older churches. The first from the Medieval times and the other dated to the Byzantine period. This is one of the most sacred sites in Israel for the Catholic faith. This is the place that Peter received the primacy and responsibility of leading and enlightening the nations.

In the Catholic Church, the Holy Father is the successor to Peter. He carries on the command of Jesus to "Feed my sheep."

Today, we can visit and touch the very rock upon which Jesus stood, where Jesus and Simon broke bread together, and Jesus granted the primacy to Peter. This is the primacy that the Pope continues with the Catholic world.

In Israel, you can walk quietly along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, feel the cool breeze and the mist from the waves of the lake upon your face. Close your eyes as you take a deep breath and listen to the waves. Envision, and nearly, if not clearly see the small fishing boat with Simon and the disciples returning to the shores to become the rock and the foundation of the church. ●



Church of the Primacy of St. Peter on the Sea of Galilee

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