

Fly Fishing's Patron Saint

~ Bishop Zeno of Verona ~

There is virtually a Catholic Patron Saint for every trade, country, cause, group and special interest that you can imagine. What exactly is a Patron Saint? They are canonized virtuous and holy men and women who are defenders, guardians, intercessors and advocates of those people who are involved with one of the above mentioned movements or activities.

The Patron Saint of Fishing is not to be confused with the Patron Saint of Fly Fishing. St. Peter and St. Andrew, the apostles of Jesus, are normally considered the Patron Saint's of Fishing. They were commercial fishermen who fished with nets. Fly fishing is considered 'angling,' fishing with rod, line and hook.

The early history of angling is cloudy at best. The first written account of angling dates back to the Egyptians some 2000 years ago; yet hooks of wood and bone date back over 20,000 years ago.

The Greeks and Romans provide more detailed accounts of angling, which leads us to the subject of Saint Zeno.

Zeno was born in Mauretania, Africa around 300 A.D. and was probably a Roman Citizen. He lived during the reign of Constantine the Great. In 340 A.D. Zeno moved to Verona, Italy. It was here that he received a good classic education and lived as a monk. In 362 A.D. he was appointed Bishop of Verona. During his reign he baptized and converted many people, built a basilica, established a convent, trained priests and reformed the funeral mass.



St. Zeno ~ painting by Jacobo Da Bassano circa 1538

Zeno is always pictured or sculpted wearing his mitre and carrying his scepter or fishing pole; most probably a lissome wood rod and line of horse hair. The flies of time long past were most probably of feathers and wool.

Local tradition states that Zeno, the protector of fishermen was fond of fishing the Adige River for brown trout and grayling (it now contains rainbows), using a line with three flies. He fished to feed himself rather than for recreation.

The fish of course, has long been a symbol Christian religion and there are those, like St. Augustine who say that Zeno is pictured with rod and fish because he was “a fisherman of souls.” Zeno, the Patron Saint of fly fishermen died circa 380 A.D.

See you on the water.....

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