



THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES

The tapestry, depicting the episode from Luke's Gospel (5:1-10) known as the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, is the first of the Peter stories. The tapestry recounts the call to the apostolate of Peter and Andrew, humble fishermen from Galilee, designated by Christ to become 'fishers of men'. Raphael chooses to depict the moment after the miracle, the fishing that had prodigiously filled the empty nets. The boat is, in fact, now full of fish. Peter, with folded hands, is kneeling before Jesus followed by Andrew who, with outstretched arms, expresses his astonishment at the miracle that just happened. Beside them, James and John laboriously hoist the heavy net. At the far end the father Zebedee, depicted as an ancient river god, holds the boat. The composition, balanced in a calm classical equilibrium, runs through a concatenation of gestures and glances from left to right, culminating in the figure of the blessing Christ. An undefined city surrounded by walls and scattered groups of people form the background. The three cranes in the foreground, a symbol of vigilance, probably allude to one of the fundamental virtues of the rulers and thus of Peter, Christ's first vicar on earth, and of Leo X himself, Peter's successor.

Some preparatory drawings show the evolution of the compositional idea. Raphael first seems to have thought of placing in the foreground the crowd witnessing the miracle, while relegating the main event to the background. Also known are some preparatory studies for the cranes and birds by Giovanni da Udine, the pupil particularly versed in the naturalistic genre. The muscular and vigorous appearance of the main figures shows the influence of Michelangelo with whom Raphael knew he had to compare himself in the Sistine Chapel: however, the vigour and impetus of Buonarroti translates into a noble and grandiose classicism in Raphael's creations. The *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* is considered among the finest, if not the finest tapestry in the series, standing out for its balance, classicism, naturalism and softness of tone and form. The corresponding cartoon is also undoubtedly among the best of the set, denoting the direct involvement of the Master. The rich gilded border at the bottom depicts, according to the traditional interpretation, two episodes in the life of Leo X: *His entry as a cardinal into conclave* and *The homage of the cardinals following his election* on 11 May 1513.

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