



February 2018

Very early in each year, on January 3, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus. Why have a feast in honour of a name? Because names matter. They matter a lot, because they represent and make present the one who is named.

On a purely human level, names matter. We call a person's name, and the person responds. When I sign my name on a contract, I am bound by it. When I sign my name on a cheque, money leaves my account.

Names are at the heart of our most profound experiences. When we are baptized, the celebrant says, "(name), I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." When a man and a woman are joined in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, each says, "I (name) take you (name) to be my (husband or wife)." When a candidate is to be ordained, he is called by name, and responds, "Present", offering himself for ordination.

What is true on the human level is even more striking on the divine level. A key moment in the Old Testament is the experience of God by Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3). God reveals to Moses the divine name, which makes God present. The name revealed to Moses was treated with great reverence. In fact, the second of the 10 commandments tells us not to take the name of the Lord in vain. And in the Our Father we pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." When we say "may your name be held holy" we are really saying "may you be held holy." The name makes present the person: it is that significant. We recognize that fact when we begin our prayers "In the *name* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

We Christians adore Jesus as our Lord and God, God with us. "Christ" is not the family name of Jesus; it is a title; "the Christ" - the Messiah, the anointed one. We affirm that Jesus is the Christ, the Lord, and we even have a special feast of Christ the King near the end of the year. "Christ" is a title expressing the majesty of Jesus.

The most persecuted people in the world today are Christians, and many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are being killed, or imprisoned, or exiled, with their churches and homes destroyed, because they are faithful to Jesus, the Christ, the Lord of their lives. The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church. In 1927 the great priest Miguel Pro was martyred in Mexico for his faith in Jesus. There are photographs of him courageously facing the bullets of the firing squad, crying out "Long live Christ the King." Father Pro was a Jesuit, a member of the "Society of Jesus", whose emblem is "IHS", which are the first three letters of "Holy Name of Jesus" in Greek. But all Christians form a society of Jesus and we are committed not only to be ready, like Father Pro, to die for him - and even more, to live for him by showing his love in all that we do.

If the title "Christ" is sacred, and worth dying for and living for, even more so is the Holy Name of Jesus. The name itself means that God saves us, and rescues us from our sins. From the earliest times, though his disciples were willing to use his title of "Christ" freely, they treated his Holy Name with great reverence. I recommend reading Philippians 2:6-11, based on a very early

Christian hymn, which speaks of the second person of the Blessed Trinity coming amongst us, sharing our suffering, even to death on the cross, and so “God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The Holy Name of Jesus represents our Saviour, the Lord of our lives, and makes him present. When we honour his name, we honour him; when we dishonour his name, we dishonour him.

Here are some practical implications of that fact:

- 1) We should use his name reverently in prayer. I strongly urge everyone to constantly pray the “Jesus prayer”: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.”
- 2) We should give some sign of our recognition that his Holy Name represents him and makes him present. When I was young, it was suggested that one bow the head when pronouncing the Holy Name of Jesus. That is a good custom, and helps a bit to remind us of the adoration which we owe to the Lord of our lives. If we can more deeply become committed to that adoration, we pray that we will more effectively make the love of Jesus present in our suffering world through our actions.
- 3) We do not mock or treat other people disrespectfully. How much more must we treat the Holy Name of our saviour with reverence? The name makes present the person who is named, and so disciples of Jesus do not use that sacred name to curse, and we do not use it in a trashy or trivial or flippant manner. We ask our friends who do not share our faith to respect the name of Jesus, as we are equally committed not to treat disrespectfully what is sacred to others.

I will end with a quote from a beautiful hymn that is based on Philippians 2:6-11:

“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, every tongue confess him king of glory now; 'tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord, who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

In your heart's enthrone him; there let him subdue, all that is not holy, all that is not true. Look to him, your Saviour, in temptation's hour; let his will enfold you in its light and power.

Christians, this Lord Jesus Shall return again, With his Father's glory, O'er the earth to reign;
He is God the saviour, He is Christ the Lord, Ever to be worshiped, Always blest, adored.”

+ Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto