

Homily for December 18, 2019

Wednesday, Advent 3

What is in a Name?

To give someone a name is to mark that person as being special to us. When we hear of the birth of a baby, one of the first questions asked of the parents is “What is his name? What is her name”? For we know this child and their name are very special to the new mom and dad.

Names really matter. Nowhere do we see this more clearly than in the Bible, Matthew has a special focus on names. His Genealogy which was read yesterday is like a great crescendo in music that builds to its fortissimo (that means really loud) in today’s Gospel where we hear announced two names. Names that are the most important in the whole of the Bible. In the Gospel reading Joseph has a dream and in his dream he is told two names that are to be given to the miraculous child soon to be born to Mary. The first name is the one we are all familiar with, “Jesus”. Just as my name has a meaning: “Loved by God”, so too with the name Jesus. It means “He will save his people from their sins”. Then there is a second name given to God’s greatest Christmas present: “Emmanuel”. A name that means “God is with us”.

Jesus and Emmanuel are the names by which Jesus will be known because they are the names that define his mission his reason for his earthly life. Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who was born into our world so that he could save his people from their sins.

To put this simply God became a man so to save man from sin.

Now Sin is not primarily things we do but the way we think about our lives which then is expressed by the things we do. Those things we bring to Jesus through the priest in Confession.

I have mentioned this before that the middle letter of the word sin is the letter “I”. When we are self-centred we are inclined to think that my life is really about me. And yet when we come to know Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us, we begin to realize that my life is really about God; about knowing that I am both loved by God so in turn, I can through my life show others the love of God.

When this happens in our lives, we discover that God and his love are what is most important in life. This is what the Church calls “Conversion”. Here is the beautiful thing about conversion, it does not begin with us but begins with God. When you were baptized you were baptized into the Trinitarian name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This means that even before you knew God’s love for you, God declared his love for you. It’s like the love of parents. They knew they loved you before you knew they loved you. As we grow older we become more aware of their love and we want to love them in turn

Well conversion to God is like this too. The more we are aware of his love for us the more we recognize there are ways I live my life that is like looking at a Crucifix from that back side. Jesus is obscured and I am at the centre. But as we desire to grow in receiving and responding to Jesus' love then we not only see him more clearly but in turn we live our own lives in a new way whereby we want to show in our lives that God is with us.

These two names for Jesus are always present whenever we enter a Catholic Church. For here we see the Crucifix, that constant image that points to the meaning of Jesus' name "He will save his people from their sin". In the Tabernacle the Consecrated Hosts are present, a constant reminder that Jesus is also Emmanuel, "God with us."

Then in the Mass these two names come together as the Sacrifice of the Cross is made present to us on the Altar so that we can come forward and receive Jesus into our souls and thus further our own conversion. This allows us to be empowered to live not with the letter I at the centre of our lives but the letter G. For when God is at the centre not only do we experience salvation from sin but we can become people, who know we are loved by God. Loved by God so that in turn you can use your life in the service to love others and so show them Emmanuel, God with us.

Yes names really do matter. The more you think upon the two names Jesus and Emmanuel and his mission, the more we will know and understand your mission in too.