

Homily for July 8th 2020

Wednesday 14th Week of Ordinary Time

Each of us is called by name

A beautiful story is told of Helen Keller. She was the American who was deaf and blind who surmounted physical challenges to become the first blind and deaf person to earn an undergraduate degree in the USA.

When Helen learned to communicate, Anne Sullivan – her first teacher – wanted Helen to hear about Jesus Christ. She summoned one of the most renowned Protestant preachers of his day, Phillips Brooks. Brooks came, and with Sullivan interpreting, he talked to Helen Keller about Jesus Christ. Soon a smile lighted Helen's face and she beckoned for a chance to respond. Through Anne Sullivan she said, "Mr. Brooks, I have always known about God, but until now I didn't know His name."

Jesus' name, says the Bible is the name above every other name, because in naming Jesus we affirm God has made himself known to us.

That we know God's personal name is Jesus, underscores that every name has significance and great value. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states it this way:

God calls each one by name. Everyone's name is sacred. The name is the icon of the person. It demands respect as a sign of the dignity of the one who bears it. (CCC 2158)

That God calls each by name is the theme stated in the first chapter of Genesis where God calls creation into being. As he names each dimension of the universe – it then comes forth. The sacredness of each name is underscored in Genesis chapter two, where the Man gives names to every living thing in the Garden of Eden, culminating in the name of this other who is most like him, the Woman who is "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh".

I love the next dimension of the name stated by the Catechism. The name is an Icon of the person. Remember that icons are representations of the saints, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus that point beyond themselves to the reality of heavenly communion.

Therefore a person's name points to their inherent dignity, a theme that is emphasized in a special way in the Sacrament of Baptism where four times the names of the person to be baptized is highlighted. At the beginning of the Liturgy, the minister asks of the parents: "What name do you give to your child?" Then, immediately before the baptism the minister asks if the parents now wish for the child, whose name is mentioned again, to be baptized into the "faith of the Church". Having answer "'It is", the child's name is joined with the Holy Name as the minister then declares "Name.... I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. Then at the conclusion of the Rite the minister refers to the white garment as he declares:

Name, you have become a new creation, and have clothed yourself in Christ. See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven.

The Bible is very clear that God calls each one by name. That everyone's name is sacred is a theme made clear in today's Gospel where Matthew names the 12 Apostles. Each one of their names takes on a greater significance when joined to the name of Jesus. And as the Lord says in the text, they are "to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" May I suggest this means they are to go to those who have forgotten the significance of their name, because they have forgotten that there is another who has called them to himself in baptism. The vocation of the Church is to accompany people in coming to know ever more deeply the name of Jesus and by so knowing him we will come to more fully know ourselves as those who having been called by Jesus recognize we have a name that is sacred because it is an icon of who we are.

Therefore my beloved brothers and sisters remember that yours and every name demands respect as a sign of the dignity of the one who bears it.