

Homily for September 12, 2017

There is a story about Helen Keller, the American woman who was blind and deaf and died in 1968. When Helen learned to communicate, Anne Sullivan, her teacher, decided it was time for her to hear about Jesus Christ. She summoned a renowned clergyman, Phillips Brooks to meet with Helen. 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 her teacher she said, "Mr. Brooks, I have always known about God, but until now I didn't know His name."

Helen Keller was more fortunate than most people in her spiritual sensitivity. She knew God's nature but not His name. Most people without Christ know His name but not His nature. Jesus is the revelation of the nature of God.

In revealing his name to us, Jesus in turn calls us by name. We see this in today's Gospel where the twelve are called together, and notice we hear each of their names. The Gospel of Jesus is personal and particular; as we name Him, he in turn helps us to know more fully our name. This is because he helps us to know ourselves. When this happens, we share also in the name of another, our Blessed Lady, who on this day we honour her most holy name.

Mary in her life always sought to honour her son's, name. Thomas Aquinas said of Mary's name:

It is surely fitting that her name is "Mary", which is akin to Star of the Sea "Maria – Maris Stella". For just as sailors are directed to port by the star of the sea, so also are Christians guided by Mary to glory"

Such glory finds its focus in Jesus. Why is that? It is because of what Paul writes in Colossians. We live in a world that is under spiritual attack where there are forces bent on disordering and unsettling life. We are made for love and connection and justice and nonviolence, but at every turn and in every way we are twisted in the direction of hatred, separation, injustice, and violence. The human race, is best characterized as a disordered spiritual family, all of us having been marked from birth by the effects of sin. Sin has found its way into every aspect of human life, personally and institutionally.

And so, we need, not just a philosopher or social theorist or political activist or military hero, but a Saviour, someone who can break into our disordered lives from the outside and heal us. And not just any generic saviour, but the one with the Name.

The more we discover the one who can do this has the name Jesus, the more we can say with Paul that in Jesus the fullness of deity dwells bodily. Such a faith inspires us to be rooted and built up in him.

Mary's name is holy because she reflected in her life the name of her son. Hers was a life of trusting and humble confidence in God. The more the Apostles grew in that same trusting confidence the freer they became and were delivered from those rulers and authorities that want to diminish our significance and worth. Think for instance how in the brutality of Auschwitz, people had no name, only a number.

Not so for the Christian. As Proverbs says:

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,

Because we know Jesus' name, who came to us because one named Mary was open to God, so too our names find their greatest meaning when they are joined to the Holy names of Mary and Jesus.