

Holy is his Name

Pastoral Letter on the Holy Name of Jesus



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The Name of Jesus is held in veneration by all who believe in Christ. We bow our head reverently when it is pronounced. It becomes a prayer keeping us in contact with our Lord and God, and deepening our friendship with Christ, our Saviour.

The Franciscan Saint, Bernadine of Siena (1380 – 1444) was a fervent apostle of the Holy Name of Jesus. He wrote and preached extensively about it. Through it, he obtained much reconciliation and peace for families in turmoil and conflict. The Franciscan Family in Ireland celebrated a Year of the Holy Name in 2014. A beautiful prayer they had for the occasion is printed below.

To say the Name of Jesus as a prayer in times of danger or temptation is a source of help and strength. At such moments of trouble, we may not have time for a lengthy prayer. However, the Name of Jesus can be in our hearts and on our lips in an instant. It puts us into contact with God and saves us from the attacks of evil. It is the name of our best friend, who is willing to help us at any time. We can imagine that our heavenly Father has a deep love for the Name of Jesus, since it was the name he chose for his Son when he sent him into the world to teach us and to save us. The Lord himself repeatedly told us how powerful a prayer in his Name is: “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son...truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. Until now, you have asked nothing in my name; ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (Jn 14:13; 16:23-24).

The Second Commandment

Among the Ten Commandments, we have one by which God prescribes respect for his name: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (Ex. 20:7). This commandment governs our

use of speech in sacred matters and forbids every improper use of the names of God, of Jesus, of Our Lady and the Saints. The Catechism tells us that deliberately to use the name of God or of Jesus with hatred and reproach is to sin gravely. Irreverence for God and his Holy Name and for sacred matters is at times present in certain sectors of society. This is embarrassing and painful for believers but not merely for them. "People of goodwill can be as dismayed as men and women of faith at the departures from decency in speech and the disregard for the holiness of God's Name" (*Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 392).

Therefore, the Name of Jesus should be treated with respect. A traditional practice is to bow one's head when pronouncing the Holy Name of Jesus. Indeed, some Saints, when they heard the name of Jesus being used in a disrespectful manner, would also bow their head, as a silent reminder that holy things should be kept holy.

It is sad to hear the Name of Jesus being used carelessly and unheedingly, at times as a curse instead of a blessing, in uncultured and rough language. It is offensive in public, and if used over the airwaves in a reckless manner, a person would have to apologise.

All religions would honour the sacred name of their God and hold it in veneration. The Jews regarded the name of the God who revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai as a name that was so exalted that it was not to be pronounced, and they began to use a different name, Adonai, meaning Lord. Muslims do not allow the name of their great prophet, Mohammed, to be profaned in any way.

Christians, too, should keep holy the Name of Jesus, the Son of God, and not use it in a heedless or offensive manner or as an expression of anger or hatred, or simply to emphasise a point. For some people it becomes a habit, so that they no longer notice that they are taking

the Name of Jesus in vain. And, yet, they are not completely unaware of the words they use, for if a priest happens to come into the company, you could hear them say; "Excuse the language, Father". But it is with the Lord himself they should excuse themselves and from him ask pardon.

The words and the names we use are important. We honour a person if we use his name with respect. To say that bad language is only words, and that they mean nothing, is not true. The disrespectful use of a name dishonours another person. Furthermore, we shall honour each other if we learn to honour God, for we are made in his image and likeness.

Hallowed be thy Name

In the prayer taught to us by Jesus himself, the first petition addressed to God is one that asks God's name to be kept holy: "Hallowed by thy Name." This is a very reverent and discreet way of asking God to make sure that his holy name is not profaned by us. We have to do our own part by maintaining deep respect for the Name of Jesus, and using it as a prayer rather than a curse.

If we do so, then our use of the Name of Jesus is done with worship and love. It gives praise to God and deepens our friendship with Christ. This is expressed in the great prayers of Scriptures, the Psalms, which we use as a response and meditation after listening to the first Reading at Mass. To give but a few examples: when delivered from harm, the psalmist praises God's holy name: "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" (Ps 34:3). Or again, in gratitude and praise "Blessed be the name of the

Lord from this time forth and for evermore! From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the Lord is to be praised!" (Ps 113:2-3)

The name is identified with the person. To honour the Holy Name is to honour Jesus; to profane his Name is to offend the Lord himself. Therefore, when the Apostles were beaten and then released from prison, Sacred Scripture says that "they left the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the *name*" (Acts 5: 41). They had preached Christ and his message. They suffered on account of his Name, that is, on account of Christ Jesus himself.

A Name given from Heaven

The name Jesus was not chosen by Mary and Joseph. It was given by God himself and announced to them by the angel Gabriel. To Our Lady it was said: "You will conceive...and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus" (Lk 1: 31). And to Joseph in a dream, the angel said: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). In fact, the word Jesus means "The Lord saves."

St Peter tells us that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). It is by faith in the power of the name of Jesus of Nazareth that the Apostles perform miracles and heal the sick and the crippled, for "there is salvation in no one else" (Acts 4:12). To the lame beggar, Peter says: "In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, rise and walk" (Acts 3:6). St Paul teaches that the glory of the name of Jesus comes from what He did to save us: humbling himself, even unto death, so that God the Father "bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Phil. 2:7-10).

To repeat the Holy Name of Jesus with devotion and love is a simple but powerful prayer. Many people, for one reason or another, manage no more. It is an easy prayer to say whether a person is sad or tired, at work or walking along the street, in moments of danger or temptation. The devil flees at the Holy Name. It gives honour to God and brings peace of soul. It sums up all the things we wish to say to God, and for which at times we have no words. It deepens our friendship with Christ, our Saviour, and obtains many blessings for us.

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We can rightly imagine that no one loved the name of Jesus as his Blessed Mother did. He was her child and her Son. She attributed all her graces and privileges, not to herself, but to God. "For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Lk 1:49).

May Our Lady teach us to respect her divine Son and to use the Holy Name of Jesus with reverence and love.

The Holy Name of Jesus is sometimes abbreviated as IHS, which are the first two letters and the last letter of the Name of Jesus in Greek. It appears also on the coat of arms of Pope Francis. In fact the Jesuits took it as an abbreviation of Iesus Hominum Salvator (Jesus the Saviour of men). It was St Bernadine who placed IHS on yellow rays symbolising the light and blessings which Jesus the Son of Righteousness sheds on our lives. We are indebted to the Franciscans who down the centuries have spread devotion to the Holy Name and love for Jesus.

The following is a beautiful prayer used for the Year of the Holy Name of Jesus, and which comes from Franciscan Spirituality:

JESUS, yours is the name above all names;
We offer you our heartfelt praise and gratitude.
Deepen in us an abiding reverence
For your Holy Name.

Jesus, Saviour, heal the wounds within
That our sin and fear have inflicted.
Set us free from all that hinders us from
Rejoicing in your boundless love
And sharing your goodness with others.

Jesus, Friend, draw us ever closer to you.
We entrust all we carry in our hearts
To your abundant mercy.

Jesus, Lord, pour out
The Holy Spirit upon your people
That our lives may overflow with your grace,
Our days be filled with your love,
And all our actions shine with your light. Amen