

The Name of Jesus

Numbers 11:25-29
Psalm 19
James 5:1-6
Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

In 1990, the Christian Rock band, Petra, released a CD entitled, “Beyond Belief.” One of the songs on the album is called, “What’s in a Name.” The refrain of the song asks the questions—

What's in a name that the demons flee?
What's in a name that the captives go free?
What's in a name that every knee should bow?
In the name of Jesus, name above all names
There is power and glory, forever and ever.

As Christians, we know that there is power in the name of Jesus. Sacred Scripture attests to the fact that His name is powerful and special. Saint Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, wrote, “At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Philippians 2:10). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul tells us that “whatever [we] do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17a). Because the early Christians understood the power in the name of Jesus Christ, they used it frequently in their ministry. In the Acts of the Apostles, chapter three, we read about the crippled beggar who asked Peter and John for money. Peter’s response was, “I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, [rise and] walk” (Acts 3:6). The man immediately got up and walked.

In our Gospel reading today, we are reminded again of the power of the name of Jesus. In the story, the apostle John was concerned because someone he did not know was driving out demons using Jesus’ name.¹ Rather than being angry at the man who used His name, Jesus replied, “Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me” (Mark 9:39). In this very simple exchange of words, Jesus actually teaches us something *extremely* profound about the power of His name—it’s relational, not magical!

All of us have used Jesus’ name in different ways and at different times in our lives. We often begin and end prayer in the name of Jesus. We bind evil spirits in the name of Jesus. Regardless of how we spiritually use the name of Jesus Christ, we must never forget that the name is meant to reflect a relationship with Him, not a form of magic. In other words, it is not the five letters, particularly arranged and spoken that give power to our use of the name of Jesus, but rather, it is our relationship with Jesus Christ—His Spirit alive and active in the core of our being. This is the reason why Jesus is not concerned in our Gospel reading today. In order for the man to effectively use Jesus’ name, he must have already allowed himself to be conformed to the image and likeness of Christ in a particular way and to a particular depth.

There is a wonderful story in the Acts of the Apostles that demonstrates the lesson that Jesus taught in our Gospel today. In Acts, chapter nineteen, we read—

¹ Mark 9:38

Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those with evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” When the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, tried to do this, the evil spirit said to them in reply, “Jesus I recognize, Paul I know, but who are you?” The person with the evil spirit then sprang at them and subdued them all. He so overpowered them that they fled naked and wounded from that house.

-Acts 19:13-16

The demons recognized Jesus and they recognized Christ present in Saint Paul, but they did not recognize Jesus in the Jewish exorcists. This story demonstrates that it is not the word “Jesus” that is effective in ministry and prayer, but rather, it is Christ alive within us through a relationship of love. This is true not only with the work of exorcists, but even in our every day prayer. When we make a prayer, “in the name of Jesus Christ,” it is only done in His name to the extent that we have chosen to let His Spirit and love be alive within us. In this way, every time we make a prayer in Christ’s name, we are actually encouraging ourselves and others to surrender to Christ’s transformative power at work within us—to surrender to being made more and more in His image and likeness!

How, then, can we more authentically pray in the name of Jesus Christ? We can cultivate a desire within us for knowing Christ. We can choose to learn as much as we can about what Christ did and said and what He was interested in and how He treated other people. We can pray for His Spirit to be alive and active within us and put into practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis. We can gently critique our words and actions based on what we know of Christ. The more our lives reflect Christ’s own life, the more effective His name will be in our prayers and in our service.

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

✚ Read Acts chapter 3 and pay attention to the importance Peter places on the name of Jesus Christ. In prayer, write a letter to Jesus and ask Him to share with you the particular ways that Peter reflected His image and likeness. Then, ask Jesus to share with you the particular ways that *you* reflect His image and likeness.

✚ Act of Consecration to Jesus

Lord Jesus Christ, I consecrate myself today anew and without reserve to your divine Heart. I consecrate to you my body with all its senses, my soul with all its faculties, my entire being. I consecrate to you all my thoughts, words and deeds, all my sufferings and labors, all my hopes, consolations and joys. In particular I consecrate to you this poor heart of mine so that it may love only you and may be consumed as a victim in the fire of your love.

I place my trust in you without reserve and I hope for the remission of my sins through your infinite mercy. I place within your hands all my cares and anxieties. I promise to love you and to honor you till the last moment of my life, and to spread, as much as I can, devotion to your most Sacred Heart.

Do with me what you will, my Jesus. I deserve no other reward except your greater glory and your holy love. Take this offering of myself and give me a place within your divine Heart forever. Amen.