

MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS - 2022

1Jn 2:29-3:6

Jn 1:29-34

In Scripture there is a close relationship between a person's name and that person. In the New Testament, the name of Jesus is used as a synonym for Jesus himself. Healings and exorcisms were carried out in his name, and St Paul tells us that is through his name we have been justified, and that at his name every knee should bow (Phil 2:9). To believe in the power of the name of Jesus is to believe in the power of Jesus himself.

The feast of the Holy Name has been observed since the late Middle Ages and it was the Franciscans who were granted permission in 1530 to commemorate it. One devotion is the Litany of the Holy Name which is reproduced on page 271 of the Ordinariate's St Gregory's Prayer Book. In 1721 the whole Church was prescribed to celebrate it. In the British Isles, the Sarum Rite observed the feast on August 7th and this is the date that the feast is commemorated in the Calendar of the Book of Common Prayer of 1662.

In today's gospel reading John the Baptist gives Jesus a name. He points to Jesus and says, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes up and carries the sin of the world." While we may read into this the idea of Jesus being the sacrificial lamb during his crucifixion, John may well have had another image of Jesus the Lamb of God. His image may have been that of the strong young alpha male which leads the flock of sheep. In Middle Eastern flocks of sheep there are no sheep dogs, but one or two alpha male sheep will behave like sheep dogs. They will parade up and down in front of the sheet holding them back and then on the cue from the shepherd they will lead them to pasture or water. I heard this image from an English bishop who had spent time in Lebanon and witnessed this scene many times.

St John tells us that Jesus is known by his Father who is the shepherd of his people Israel, and Jesus will 'take' or 'carry' the sin of the world. In John's gospel the sin of the world, the kosmos, is the world order of egocentricity. 'Me, Me, and even more Me, is the cry we hear around us. It is the world of individualism, entitlement, politics and power.

Jesus the Lamb of God takes up this order of self-focus and carries it. He knows its boundaries, and in him the order of the Spirit of God's Love and the self-centred world are reconciled. He carries our egocentricity and transforms it, so that those who are obedient to him and persevere, become more Christ-like and so are the Children of God who continue God's mission by bringing others to bow in reverence and obedience at the very mention of the Holy Name.

Msgr Harry Entwistle

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