

September 27, 2015 I have a Name Homily

Only recently, basketball superstar and member of the Hall of Fame, Michael Jordan, unexpectedly turned up on the evening news. By order of the court a grocery-store chain was obliged to pay Mr. Jordan the incredible sum of 8.9 million dollars for unlawfully using his name in a steak advertisement without his permission. Mr. Jordan was of the view that the integrity of his name, which he believed to be sacrosanct, had been exploited for commercial profit. In return for the use of his name, the superstar and celebrity received no compensation from the company. The court's verdict left him feeling vindicated. He later shared his thoughts with reporters. "This shows that I will protect my name to the fullest. It's my name and I worked hard for it. I am not going to let someone take it".

In a famous hymn found in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, we are told that there is "a name which is above every other name" (Phil.2:9). And the name is Jesus!

In today's gospel an unnamed exorcist relies on the name of Jesus to perform a mighty deed (Mk.9:38). He recognizes Jesus' authority, his power. One can imagine him saying, "I command you in the name of Jesus to come out!" Members of Our Lord's inner circle take offense. The man is an outsider. The disciples believe that only they were authorized to act in his name. Only they could claim to be invested with Jesus' power and authority. No one else had the right to the use of his name! The words of Moses in our first reading come to mind: "Are you jealous for my sake"? (Num.11:29)

Jesus offers a necessary clarification. "There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us"(Mk.9:43). One who does a good deed in the name of Jesus cannot be his enemy! In his letter to the Church at Philippi, St. Paul rejects any competitiveness in the area of Christian evangelization. He writes: "Of course some preach Christ from envy and rivalry, others from good will... the latter act out of love, aware that I am here for a defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not from pure motives, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment. What difference does it make, as long as in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed? And in that I rejoice". (Phil.1:15-18)

Holy is the name of Jesus! Let us ask ourselves if we reverence His Holy Name? Do we appreciate that each one of us bears his name as baptized Christians? Are we likely to utter the name of Jesus only in moments of anger and frustration?

In view of this gospel reading, I am reminded of a story John Cardinal O'Conner once told a public gathering. He said: Late one evening I peered outside my bedroom window on the third floor of my residence. Down below on the street I spotted a man who appeared to be dead. I thought to myself: Has he been the victim of a mugging? Has he suffered a stroke or a heart attack? Is he a drug addict? Is he playing possum in order to set me up as one of his victims? Is he asleep? I decide to go to him with a blanket in hand. When I finally reached him I placed the blanket over him He was unresponsive. As

I began to walk away from the unfortunate fellow, he suddenly opened his eyes, lifted up his head and, in a soft tone of voice said to me: "Sir, I have a name!"

Since we are called by name, our names have a sacred character, too. Let us call upon the name of Our Lord Jesus without fear. Let us sanctify his Holy Name by word and deed. Since we belong to Christ (Mk.9:41), let us serve him by recognizing the value and dignity of our brothers and sisters, whose names are sacrosanct and whose destiny is no different from our own.

Amen!