

**April 22, 2018 The Holy Name Of Jesus Homily:** Brothers and sisters, in the year of Our Lord 1431, a devout young Frenchwoman, Joan of Arc, was brought up on false charges of sorcery and heresy by the state. A mystic, military leader and friend of the French crown, she was inspired to lead the French forces in battle against their sworn enemy, the English. Her trial was a travesty of justice. She was condemned to a hideous death... a burning at the stake. According to eyewitnesses, Joan called upon the name of her savior as the flames enveloped her. Three times she cried, "Jesu, Jesu, Jesu". Her executioner, a man well schooled in the art of killing, was deeply moved by the saint's death. After she expired, he cried, "We have burned a saint". His guilt prompted him to seek out a priest for confession.

At the time of her execution Joan of Arc was nineteen years old! She is the patroness of France!

The background to today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:5-12) is as follows: John and Peter have been arrested for their preaching and their role in healing a cripple. They are called to appear before the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews. "By what name have you done this?" (Acts 4:7) demanded the agitated leaders of the Chosen People. "It was done in the name of Jesus whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead". The two men were forewarned not to utter a word or give any teaching in the name of Jesus. But they insisted that the source of their healing power is Jesus Himself. The powerful name of Jesus is the focus of today's first reading.

Looking back, we may recall that the name of Jesus was given from heaven and revealed His identity. "She will bear a son and you will name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt.1:21) the name Jesus means, "God saves". Jesus is the savior of all humanity.

In St. Paul's justly famous letter to the Christian community at Philippi, he quotes a hymn in which one hears the words, "God greatly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name that is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bend". (Phil. 2:9-10)

Jesus himself declares, "If you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in my name."

In the Acts of the Apostles the name of Jesus is invoked to heal the sick, perform signs and wonders, drive out demons and administer baptisms. All is done in the name of Jesus.

What further lessons may we derive from today's reading?

First, the name of Jesus is at the very heart of Christian prayer. Just consider the Eucharist. We call upon the Holy Name of Jesus at the conclusion of many of the prayers recited by the priest. A prayer familiar to virtually all Catholics, the "Hail Mary", reaches a high point in the words, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus";

Second, Once upon a time, it was a common practice for a Catholic to bow his or her head upon hearing the name of Jesus. One seldom heard anyone use the name of Our Lord in a disrespectful manner. Even the entertainment industry at one time honored his sacred name. Not so much today! Indeed, the name of Jesus is often mocked. His sacred name is often blasphemed and made the butt of jokes.

Third, the Holy Name of Jesus is a powerful weapon in our daily struggle against the forces of evil. Like Joan of Arc, we must call upon the name of Jesus whenever our faith is sorely tried.

In closing, let us repeat St. Peter's ringing defense of the Holy Name. "There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved". (Acts 4:12)

Amen!