

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday of Christmas
January 4, 2015

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Father Raymond Helmick tells a funny story from his experience in the Jesuit novitiate at Lenox in the late 1940s. *Shadowbrook* was next door to *Tanglewood*, and the director of the novitiate was friendly with Boris Goldovsky. Dr. Goldovsky was an internationally-known musicologist, and he was head of the opera department at *Tanglewood*. *Shadowbrook* had a goldfish pond but no fish. *Tanglewood* had the fish! So arrangements were made for the novices to walk over with their net and pails and scoop up a few of these goldfish. The trouble was Dr. Goldovsky was a busy man. He had neglected to tell the *Tanglewood* groundskeeper about the arrangement. So alas and alack, the groundskeeper caught the Jesuit novices in the act of scooping up *Tanglewood's* goldfish. And he may have been a bit of an anti-Catholic. The man was so angry he swore, using the Name of Jesus. At the Name of Jesus all the novices removed their caps. This made the groundskeeper even angrier! So he used the Name of Jesus again, and the novices removed their caps again. It is a wonder things were straightened out and did not escalate into World War Three!

The story deserves to be told on its own merit. But also because our appreciation for the Holy Name of Jesus may be somewhat lacking in such fervor. *We* don't doff our caps at the Name of Jesus. And because that is so, we may be standing outside the Biblical and Catholic tradition on a very important matter.

At Christmas the good news is "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Any word is a living thought clothed in language. The Divine Word of God was always God's thought. In obedience to revelation, the Divine Word made flesh was named Jesus. At Christmas He was clothed in our language and opened to us the experience of the spiritual world which had been foreign to us.

Perhaps you have had the experience of being in a great foreign city where you did not understand the language. The street signs and shops and menus were all a mystery to you. And then along came an interpreter who put it all into your own language. Suddenly all the possibilities of the city were open to your experience. That is what happened when, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

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The Catechism says the whole Bible is “one book about Jesus Christ.” God has really spoken one Word to our world. His thought about life, about mankind, and about Himself, is expressed to us in that one Word. It is all summed up in the Holy Name of Jesus, at the mention of which those Jesuit novices doffed their caps.

You and I have been baptized *in the Name of Jesus*. But we are deprived of an important feature of the Catholic tradition if we do not consider the *power* of that Name. The Feast of the Holy Name was medieval in origin. We are told we can thank the Franciscans for it. But the connection between a person and his name is an ancient and strong Biblical belief. A name is not just an identification tag for persons. A name expresses the essential nature and character of its bearer.

In *Exodus* the Name of God was on the angel that led Israel through the wilderness. God said, “Give heed to him, and hearken to his voice, for My Name is in him.” (23:21) In *Deuteronomy* we are told God chose a dwelling place for His Name. The prophet *Isaiah* wrote, “The name of God which comes from far, burning with His anger, His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue as a devouring fire” (30:27). Isaiah was asserting what is said of God Himself is said of His Name. In the Bible, to know the Name of God is to know Him as He has revealed Himself. (*Psalms* 9:10) And the full disclosure of God is given in Jesus Christ, Who has manifested His Name. (John 7:6, 26) The poet John Milton was expressing this Biblical concept in *Paradise Lost* when he said Adam was able to name the beasts and birds because *he understood their nature*. Name and nature go together.

When in the New Testament the Name of Jesus is invoked as equivalent to the Name of God, it shows the influence of this consistent Old Testament belief. We are baptized in His Name. We are told the disciples performed miracles and exorcisms “acting in His Name.” And when the Lord taught, “He who gives a cup of water in My Name has done it unto Me,” that was not just a matter of the recipient belonging to Christ but *Christ in the action* when it is done in His Name. When we read of the disciples being persecuted “for His Name’s sake” that does not mean they are representing the honor of His Church. It means *Christ is suffering persecution in them*.

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In the whole weight of our tradition there is belief the Name of Jesus has power. It has sweetness for believers. So learn to say it reverently, and as the summary of all prayer. You might consider ending all your private prayers by naming the Name of Jesus. He said, “Whatever ye shall ask in My Name.”

We may not have the opportunity to doff our caps at the Name of Jesus like those 1940s Jesuit novices. But it is the devil himself, who knows the power of the Holy Name when rightly used, which tempts us to use It in anger. Apply the Holy Name in the face of temptation, and in the darkness of fear. As Christians you and I are preparing to take this Holy Name of Jesus with us through the darkness of death as a proved friend, a friend exalted in Heaven. So let us be among those our Lord has in mind in the parable when He said, “They will reverence my son.” *In the Name of Jesus*. Amen.