

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Christmas  
January 3, 2016

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Some of you have heard a story retold periodically by Fr Raymond Helmick in the Saint Theresa Rectory dining room, and which always has the diners in stitches of laughter. Fr Helmick was a novice at *Shadowbrook* in Lenox during the late 1940s. The director of the novitiate was friendly with Boris Goldovsky, head of the opera department at nearby 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. (In their suits and caps the novices must have looked very much like the pea-green freshmen in the old Dartmouth College ditty.) Trouble was Dr. Goldovsky was a busy man. He had neglected to tell the Tanglewood superintendent of the arrangement! So the Jesuits were caught in the act of scooping up Tanglewood's goldfish. The groundskeeper was so angry he swore, using the Name of Jesus. At the Name of Jesus the novices all removed their caps. This infuriated the groundkeeper and he used the Name of Jesus again. At which the novices removed their caps again! The whole episode set back ecumenical relations one hundred years!

The story deserves to be told on its own merit. But I retell it 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 we have remembered that, "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 living thought. At Christmas the Divine Word was clothed in our language and in obedience to revelation, was named Jesus. The Word made flesh opened to us experiences of the spiritual world which had been foreign to us.

Perhaps you have been in a foreign city where you did not understand the language. Vienna was that way for us. The street signs and shops were all a mystery. Fortunately for us our daughter greeted us at the airport. She not only knew the language, she could identify a person's origins by the dialect. Suddenly for us all the possibilities of this wonderful city were open to our experience. Something like that happened when "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

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*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* says the Bible is “One book about Jesus Christ.” Almighty God has really spoken one Word to our world. Divine 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 had been taught to doff their caps.

A name is not an outdated PIN number! 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. And when 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) he 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 *St John* declares the full disclosure of God is given in Jesus Christ, Who has manifested His Name. (7:6, 26) The poet John Milton expressed this Biblical concept in *Paradise Lost* when he said Adam was able to name the beasts and birds because *he understood their nature*.

When it places the Name of Jesus alongside the Name of God the New Testament is showing the influence of this consistent Biblical belief. We are baptized in His Name. We are told the disciples performed miracles and exorcisms “acting in His Name.” And when our 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 giver being identified as a Christian, but that Christ is *in the action* where it is done in His Name. And when we read of the disciples being persecuted “for His Name’s sake” that means not just for the honor of the Church, but *Christ Himself* is being persecuted.

The whole weight of our tradition is there is power in the Name of Jesus. It has sweetness for believers. We may not have opportunity to doff our caps at the Name of Jesus like Jesuit novices seventy years ago. We can still apply the Holy Name in the face of temptation and in the darkness of fear. It is the devil himself, who knows the power of the Holy Name when rightly used, and who tempts us to use it in anger. Christians are people preparing to take this Holy Name of Jesus with

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them through the darkness of death, as a proven and trusted friend Who is exalted in Heaven. Let us therefore be among those our Lord had in mind in His parable when He said, *“They will reverence my son.”*