

**May 11, 2008**

**The Sunday of the Myrrh Bearers**

### **Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings**

One of the chief motifs in the Acts of the Apostles is the name of Jesus. In St. Peter's first sermon, after his affirmation that God had made Jesus "Lord," the Apostle goes on to assert, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (2:21). The thesis is absolute: only in the name of Jesus is salvation possible. Somewhat later St. Peter affirms, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (4:12). This is why, as part of that first sermon, Peter challenged his hearers, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (2:38; cf. 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16).

What does the Book of Acts prompt us to say about the name of Jesus?

First, it is the name we use when we speak to God. That is to say, it is invoked in prayer: it is the name that Christians call upon in faith. Perhaps the most striking example in this book is that of Stephen, whose final breath is spent in that invocation: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (7:59). Thus, Stephen dies in calling upon Jesus as Lord.

Elsewhere in the Acts of the Apostles we find the Church invoking the name of Jesus in prayer addressed to the Father (4:27-30).

There is a sense, indeed, in which "Jesus" is the only "personal" name in the Godhead. The name "Father" is, of course, generic, as are the names God, Son, and Spirit. Likewise, the sacred name revealed to Moses in the Burning Bush is "descriptive," inasmuch as it designates God as the Existing One---*Ho On*. It signifies God as essential Being.

The name of Jesus, on the other hand, is a human name, signifying a member of the human race. We refer to Jesus as "Jesus" in very much the same way that we refer to George as "George," or Abigail as "Abigail." There is nothing generic about these names. They refer to specific persons.

In the same way, to call on the name of Jesus in prayer is to tie that prayer to a particular, identifiable person, a person specified in regard to history and geography. In Jesus, God has become human in the essential way that you and I are human. Even as God, we relate to Him as to a human being. He is one of us, and therefore He has a name like ours. In short, Jesus is the name Christians use when they speak to God. It is the substance of our prayer.

Second, Jesus is the name Christians use when they speak to men. In the Acts of the Apostles this is the name that summarizes the Gospel itself; "Jesus is Lord" is the earliest and most fundamental form of the Good News. The name of Jesus is

invoked over the lame man begging at the temple: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (3:6). This is the name in which the Jewish authorities forbade the Apostles to preach (4:17,18; 5:28,40; 9:14; 26:9). Preaching bore Jesus' name to the Gentiles (9:15). It is the substance of our preaching.

Jesus is the name used in preaching and healing, just as it is the name invoked in prayer. The Book of Acts summarizes Paul's ministry at Ephesus by saying that "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (19:17). The name of Jesus is the abbreviation of everything we have to say to mankind.

Third, Jesus is the name Christians use when they speak to demons. That is to say, this is the name of power. Thus, when Paul encountered the pythonic spirit in the young woman at Philippi, he addressed the demon, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her" (16:18).

This is the name we invoke, therefore, in the hour of temptation. This is the name in which demonic powers are put to flight. It is impossible to succumb to temptation while sincerely calling on the name of Jesus.

The Acts of the Apostles gives us, then, three settings in which to invoke the name of Jesus:

In worship, when we call upon Jesus or call upon His Father in Jesus' name. this is the name through which we have access to God.

In proclamation of the Gospel itself, whether in preaching or in healing. The name of Jesus is the summary of the Gospel addressed to men.

In combat with the demons, especially in the time of temptation. It is the summary of everything we have to say to the demons. The name of Jesus, in short, is the only name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

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