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Meditations: 3

January, Most Holy Name of Jesus

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this Christmas season.

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- The name Jesus means “God saves”
- Like oil poured out
- Praying in his name and bringing it everywhere

THE NAME given to someone was very important in Semitic cultures, since it signified the mission to which that person was called. In Israel, the name was given at circumcision, when the child was incorporated into the descendants of Abraham, as happened with Jesus, eight days after his birth (cf. *Lk 2:21*). Through the angel, God communicated to Joseph the name he should give to Mary's son: *She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins* (*Mt 1:20-21*). Today we celebrate the feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus. The entrance antiphon for the Mass invites us to reverently adore the Child we contemplate these days lying in a manger: "At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."^[1]

God changes the names of some exceptional persons in salvation history as a symbol of the mission entrusted to them. For example, Abram, became Abraham, because he would be the father of many nations; Jacob became Israel, because he wrestled with God and won; Jesus himself will give Simon the name “Cephas,” Peter, because he will be the rock on which the Church is built. At the coming of Jesus, God himself intervened to ensure that the name of the Incarnate Word would signify exactly his redemptive mission: “Yahweh saves.”

Saint Bernardine of Siena, in the early fifteenth century, spread devotion to the name of Jesus. His efforts led to the words of Saint Elizabeth being added to the Hail Mary. This Italian saint assures us: “The great foundation of faith is the name of Jesus, who makes us children of God.” Faith, he added,

“consists in the knowledge and light of Jesus, who is the light of the soul, the door to life, the foundation of eternal salvation.”^[2] We pray in the Collect of today’s Mass: “O God, who founded the salvation of the human race on the Incarnation of your Word, give your people the mercy they implore, so that all may know there is no other name to be invoked but the Name of your Only Begotten Son.”

YOUR NAME is oil poured out (Song 1:3), says the Song of Songs, referring to the Bridegroom. Indeed, the name of Jesus is like an aroma spreading its perfume throughout the house. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux points out that oil possesses three qualities that apply to the name of Jesus. Just as oil “is light, food and medicine,” so the most sweet Name of Jesus, “when preached gives light, when meditated nourishes, and when invoked, relieves and soothes.”^[3]

First, Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness, a light we want our behavior to reflect. To receive this light from Christ, we must open the eyes of our soul and cleanse them with the remedy of the sacraments. Saint Josemaría encouraged us to pray, “*Ut videam, ut videamus, ut videant!*” so that with our clean gaze we may make clean the lives of many others. Secondly, Jesus is food for our soul. When we say his name, our heart is filled with joy. Saint Bernard adds: “Write what you will, I shall not relish it unless it tells of Jesus. Talk or argue about what you will, I shall not relish it if you exclude the name of Jesus. Jesus to me is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, a song in the heart.”^[4] —

Lastly, his precious name is medicine for our weakness. “Nothing so curbs the onset of anger, so allays the upsurge of pride. It heals the wounds of envy, restrains the attacks of lust,

quenches the flames of concupiscence; it cools the thirst of avarice and banishes all disordered desires.”^[5] On this feast we can ask the Holy Spirit to pour this holy oil into our hearts, and over our lips and our works. With the psalmist in today’s liturgy we acclaim: *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!* (Ps 8:1).

TRULY, TRULY, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full (Jn 16:23-24). This is how our Lord encouraged his apostles on the eve of his passion. Trusting in our Lord’s own words, we can frequently invoke his holy name. As Saint Teresa said: “Let us consider the glorious Saint Paul: it doesn’t seem that any other name fell from his lips than that of Jesus, as coming from

one who kept the Lord close to his heart.”^[6]

Saint Josemaría taught us a wonderful aspiration: *Iesu, Iesu, esto mihi semper Iesus*: Jesus, Jesus, be for me always Jesus. If we say it often, we will be amazed at its effects, especially when we feel sad, worried or tired. “I call him Jesus, without fear, when alone with Him,” he once told us. “Here, close by the Tabernacle, I am not embarrassed to call Him by his name. My son, you too, tell Him that you love Him, that you will love Him always, ever more and more!”^[7] Our mission – the mission of ordinary Christians – is to spread the fragrance of this name all around us.

Saint Bernardine continues, “This name should be proclaimed so that it may shine out, and not remain hidden. But it cannot be cast about by a defiled heart or an impure

mouth, but rather must be displayed as in a chosen vessel.”^[8] The royal priesthood – the divine seal of Baptism and Confirmation – “equips us to take the name of Christ to every environment where people work and live. But never forget that our apostolate, in order to be truly effective, must be based on a profound, habitual, daily union with our Lord Jesus Christ.”^[9] With what warmth and tenderness would the name of Jesus be on lips of his Mother and Saint Joseph! Let us confidently ask them to remind us of his blessed Name, so that we may keep it permanently in our hearts.

^[1] Mass of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, Entrance Antiphon.

^[2] Saint Bernardine of Siena, Sermon 49, *On the Glorious Name of Jesus*, ch. 1.

^[3] Saint Bernard, Sermon 15, “On the Song of Songs,” II, no. 4.

[4] Saint Bernard, Sermon 15, “On the Song of Songs,” III, no. 6.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Saint Teresa, *Book of her Life*, ch. 22.

[7] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, 13 April 1954.

[8] Saint Bernardine of Siena, Sermon 49, *On the Glorious Name of Jesus*, ch. 2.

[9] Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Letter, 1 April 1985.