

Homily - Year 21 A - August 23, 2020

What's in a name? We like name brands. Name that tune. Name the 12 apostles. At the very beginning of a baptism ceremony we ask: "What name have you given to your child?"

Sometimes in our lives we may wish to be anonymous for whatever reason. We might not want notoriety. Or we take an alias because we do not want to own up to what we are doing. Even in church, we see the same people week after week and wonder who are those people I see every week.

Just to know the names of people, even if we don't know much about them, provides satisfaction. Knowing someone's name opens doors to another person's life. "You're so and so, aren't you? I think I went to school with you or I knew your sister or I worked for your father." Knowing someone's name provides a path into another person's life. The anonymous "hey, you" can put us ill at ease. The use of a name means a connection exists.

In the gospel, Jesus asks that question: "Who do people say that I am?" Jesus did not ask: "What do people say that I am?" The apostles respond with John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Elijah, or another. But the quiz goes on and Jesus asks again, not "people," but rather "you" "who do you say that I am."

This scene takes place after Jesus had been with his apostles for several years. He knew them by name. He chose them. So, Christ really wanted to know what they thought.

Peter responds on behalf of the twelve. He didn't say: "You're Jesus, the one who does miracles, the one who says some amazing things, the one who annoys people every now and then." Rather, he says: "You are the Christ, the Son of God." Peter actually acknowledges, so to speak, the other side of Jesus, the very divine side, the side that no one expected, in fact a new identity. Peter named Jesus with a new name: the Christ, meaning the chosen one.

But then Jesus changes Simon's name, gives him a new identity. He is now Peter. With that new name, Peter takes on, eventually, a new identity, the chief shepherd of what becomes the Church of Christ.

This passage was an extraordinary moment in the life of Jesus because Peter speaks about his true identity. Likewise, an extraordinary moment in Peter's life and the life of the church, the continuing presence of Christ in the world.

So, who are we? What is our name? I don't mean names like Mary, Robert, Tom, or Patricia. The name Jesus, the name Christ, the name Peter, the name Simon.. all these names mean something that goes beyond the name itself.

So, we, too, can ask about ourselves: Who am I? What do I believe? What do I stand for? If I had to choose an image that represented me and what I believe and stand for, what would that image be? If someone spoke your name to another what images, what emotions, what thoughts would be conjured up?

What's in a name? Well, we had better know the depth of the name of Jesus and we had better know what our names stand for. Hopefully, our names can parallel his name.