

Sermon for the Feast of the Holy Name
January 1, 2022
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Numbers 6:22-27
Psalm 8
Philippians 2:5-11
Luke 2:15-21

Happy New Year!

It is January 1, 2022.

The name of the month comes from the pantheon of Roman gods – Janus – who was the god of doorways. Janus had two faces, one looked forward, the other looked back.

Janus the god of beginnings and endings.

Janus also gives us the name for our keepers of doorways – janitors.

And here we are this day gathered, in a sense, as holy janitors to say *adios* to 2021 and *bienvenido* to 2022.

We stand at this doorway on the threshold of a new year.

Today will be celebrated with parades and football games for many of us, and we, here, are gathered as holy janitors to sweep away the past and to sanctify this new beginning, and to pray out of a deep yearning that this year, please God, will be better than the last.

So today we invoke the name that is above every name to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name.

It used to be called the Feast of the Circumcision, which explains why we call it Holy Name for we are a bit squemish.

It was on the eighth day that a son was named in Israel – when he was circumcised to identify him as a Jew, one of God’s chosen people, and he received a name, which helped mold his personal identity.

Names are important, and we put a lot of weight on names. Think about the importance that is conveyed when we use our complete name, middles and hyphens and Jr.’s and all, in a vow or an oath.

When my brother sister and I were growing up, we would love to hear our names spoken by our mother, mostly. It was when both our first and middle names were invoked that we knew we were in trouble. The recital of the litany of Arthur Raymond, William Alan, Kathy Diane as an imperative litany that brought us up short and silenced us.

Names are not identity itself, but rather they reflect identity. It’s the closest our limited language can come to describing a person, an object, or a feeling. Word are vessels that carry the messy, complex, and contradictory realities we wish to convey.

Names mean something. The name of Jesus came from the Angels. The name *Jesus* comes from the Greek transcription of the Hebrew name Yeshua for Jesus. It means, simply, *God saves*.

And it was one the eighth day that Jesus received his identity, which would learn, grow, and live into the destiny God ordained. As Paul wrote: at the name of Jesus every name would bow, on earth and in heaven.

The name Jesus Christ reconciles the two truths of Jesus’ nature – fully divine, fully human.

When we invoke the name of Jesus Christ, we invoke more than mere words: Christ is one and the same with the Creator of the Universe, there at the beginning of all that was, and is, and will be.

Jesus was born in a manger, not on a throne,
not even a clean, sweet-smelling place.
They were visited by shepherds,
who were neither distinguished nor sweet-smelling.

Mary and Joseph raised Jesus in a very a human life.
Think of it: a life just like the rest of us: diaper rash and body odor,
pain and sorrow, thirst and hunger, frustration and argument,
and yes, bad smells. And he was called Jesus.

It was with the name of Jesus that the sick were healed and demons cast out.
And it is through the name of Jesus that we pray to God
that this year may be better than the last one – Please, O Lord, it must be.

The last two years have been, and continues to be, truly a time of trial.
So we come together on New Year's Day, and we pray
that we may sweep away the pain of the past
to clean the doorway for a new beginning.

“The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

That's the blessing that God promises Moses to pass on to the people of Israel
as they wander the wilderness on their way to the promised land.

It seems like we, too, are wandering in the wilderness
because of all the uncertainties that plague our lives in this time of Covid.

And there is hope.
We endure.
We persevere.
We do what we can.
And we pray.

We pray that our leaders open their hearts to the Holy Spirit
so that God's will for us will enter in, and we will be made a new people.

We pray that the hearts of those who hate will be filled with Love.

We pray that the hearts of those who cheat and steal
will be turned from greed and envy.

We pray that we may see the face of Christ in all those
with whom we disagree
so that the Spirit of Reconciliation may rise from our hearts to sing a new song.

We pray that the hearts of all of us would be so filled with God's Love
and the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we will be able to work together,
and embrace each other to break the bonds of the past
and beckon the dawn of a new day.

And we pray that we each be given the grace
to work for God's Kingdom in the here and now
so that we will all know that all of us are children of God.

Amen.