

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 21st Sunday Ordinary Year A1

Recently, I went to lunch with my mother and father in Owensboro at a small diner we frequent (*a great little lunch buffet*), and the place was crowded with no table available, so when we walked in, a new waitress walked up and asked mom, 'How many in your group?' Mom said 'three'. Then we just started to talk to each other and wait. The waitress called out a couple names, maybe it was a 'Hayes', a 'Webb' & a 'Smith' family. And it didn't hit me at first as we just kept talking, she was calling out a couple times 'Priest family', Just 'Priest', it sounded coincidental to me (I was in my black suit and collar). I noticed the waitress conferring with her hostess and then she walked up to mom saying 'I'm sorry she made that note fast without getting your name, and just wrote down 'Priest in Group'! That is not the first time my outfit & uniform got me asked something funny in a restaurant. Once, when I was coming back to our table after going to the bathroom, someone asked me if I could refill their drinks, please', because of just seeing my black shirt, black slacks and black shoes. I could fit in good with their waiters' uniform. (It was a local Mexican restaurant). But our gospel reading brings up the question of what people think of others, based on a look or just what they happen to know or what they happen to hear from others.

Jesus asks first, "What do people say about the 'Son of Man'- He is talking about Himself, and then that question keeps the conversation going as He gets a little more personal with His apostles, asking them further, 'Then who do YOU say I am?'

This whole gospel episode is all about names & tags, titles or addresses that reflect who we people are. Clearly the reading brings up a lot of a names (naming)

So, what is in a name? Are our names just arbitrary, impersonal tags to ID us? Often names add up over time. We may have several names (usually first middle & last-but some add hyphens and extend a little) In our Catholic tradition we get two more, with our baptismal saint name and then later confirmation saint name! But sometimes we get more personal names, reflective of qualities/ characteristics in us? Usually we call those 'nicknames' because they capture a creative angle to our personalities, maybe symbolic of a hobby/interest or some personal event/habit or experience(*like' work nickname', or 'sports team nickname'*). Do you have a nickname – if so, what is the story behind it? When I was a kid I was called 'Frank' by an older brother for sure, but it caught on with others to call me it, because I loved hot dogs (*we called them frankfurters or franks a lot more back then*).

But I lived on franks – I could eat them all the time. I would even get one as snack and eat it cold uncooked, straight out of the plastic package from the fridge (I figured we eat those little look alike ‘Vienna sausages’, cold straight out of can, so why not hot dog!). But later in high school, I picked up the nickname, ‘Brillo’ by a couple classmates, and even later my grandad Neel (God rest His soul) called me ‘the preacher’. But nicknames are everywhere. And in the gospel, we see that Jesus had a tendency to give a unique tag or nickname to his apostles, such as today’s Simon renamed as ‘Peter’ (Rock or Rocky as a firm foundational leader to depend on- *or was it because he’d sink like a rock in water without Jesus!*). But Peter-Rocky is not the only nickname Jesus gave to others. He also called James and John, ‘Sons of Thunder’ (*they were the excitable ones in the group- ‘thunderboys’ because they bring fireworks*). Or Thomas called ‘Didymus’ or Twin, (*think of that as ‘Second time Charlie, because it takes two times to convince that one- Jesus had to come back a second time after resurrection for Thomas*), or Nathaniel Jesus calls, ‘True Israelite’ (*or Mr Orthodox-Mr Right-Mr Israelite!*). But also Jesus says of ‘Herod’ once, ‘Go tell that Fox’ (*Luke 13:32-about Jesus not being intimidated by Herod’s power*).

Today’s gospel, in fact, is brimming over with names. Think of them all: John Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, any prophets, Simon, Peter, Jonah, even Caesar Augustas, Herodian Philip. But we know that of all those names, the most important one to know is Jesus. Peter points that out! Yet, this gospel wants us to be thinking of names. What is in a name? And what I find runs through the whole of the gospel reading is that Jesus wants to know what **we** call Him -Who do you say I am? Who is He to us? How do we think of Him and describe Him to others?

Keep in mind, too, with this reading, where it all happens today. It is a significantly named location: It’s just as symbolic as how Jesus renames Simon. All this happens at Caesarea Philippi. Just saying that place, could elicit the reaction, ‘Ooooooooooh’ Emperor Caesar & King Philip – they are powerful guys (& a corrupt good ole boys club). This place Caesarea Philippi was an elite and glam, resort style area, that had a hidden spring coming out of a cave that similar to the Sea Galilee, it fed into the Jordan River. It becomes the administrative center of King Philip the tetrarch’s government (*center of power like NY city or Washington DC for us*). But more than a power center, it was also known as a pagan religion shrine. The city was first called Banian (*or Panian after Pagan Greek God Pan*). Then a couple decades before Jesus’ birth, Herod the Great built a temple near the spring honoring the divine (*they thought*) Augustus Caesar. By the time Jesus and his

disciples visited the region, Caesarea Philippi had been given over to Herod's son, Philip, adding his name to it. So, in a such a significantly named city (*like what we saw with Leningrad becoming Stalingrad based on who was ruler, acting like a God!*), whether it be dedicated to Greek God Pan, or Roman God Augustus, or some man who thinks he has power Emperor Caesar or King Herod, Jesus at this place, wants to know what we call Him, or how we look up to Him. Who is He to us? And Peter speaks for us (*Foundational of our Catholic Faith*) to say that Jesus is God – Our Messiah-Son of Living God. And Jesus responds by saying that such a declaration is a rock. Cities may change names, rulers come and go, but Jesus-God stands forever. He tells Peter and us that if we hold him to be Messiah-Savior to us, truly believing and calling on Him that way, then nothing can overcome us (not even gates of hell-meaning that death closes behind us-not a threat- we escape that in Christ). By keeping faith in Jesus (He being our Messiah-God), then we are firm, on the most solid of rock, and He will build upon it (work with it) for eternity. If we truly live with Jesus as the center, the God principle of our lives, then such faith- That lasts, it goes on eternally. So, the gospel asks us, so that each one of us answers Jesus Himself, "Who do we say Jesus is?" Is He to us, only like all those other names that were mentioned in the reading, or is He that 'Name above all other names' (St Paul mentions in Philippians 2:9-the Name at which all knees will bend!) as Peter leads us to see: He is Messiah, our Savior Son of the Living, True God! We may need to work on our response, formulating it ourselves, but who do we think Jesus is? Who is He to us? We need to answer. But, in the end we also keep in mind, that it may be more important, not what we name Him, but that we bear His Name on us, that He Names/Calls us and we bear His Name 'Christian'.