



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter Year C**

#### ***The Name of Jesus***

*Readings: Acts 5:27-32; 40-41, Ps 29, Ap 5: 11-14, John 21-1-19*

Many years ago, when I was the young Anglican chaplain at St. Alban's Abbey, we were joined on the Cathedral Chapter by an African charismatic pastor newly returned from the bush. For the first few weeks he listen attentively to our sermons, we were a clever lot and able to deliver thought provoking talks that tickled the ears and entertained the intellects of our very delightful and large well heeled congregation. Finally he stepped into the pulpit himself and began thus.....

'For the last six weeks I have been listening to sermons from my brother clergy. They have been beautifully prepared and well delivered but one thing has puzzled me. No-one has mentioned the name of Jesus.'

You could have heard a pin drop. Even the most senior clergy looked like someone had recently smacked them in the chops with a wet halibut.

The awful thing was, it was true. We had been so busy being clever about our Faith, we had omitted the embarrassing essential - JESUS.

For the next few weeks, I can tell you, Jesus got more name checks in the homilies than He had done for months. And it was a great lesson to me. I had joined to proclaim Jesus. How come He was now playing second fiddle to my cleverness?

Jesus, name above all names, and we had edited Him out.

This all came back into my mind this week for two reasons. One is obviously the reading from the Acts of the Apostles. The second is something Pope Francis said.

Pope Francis told his congregation a story. He said: “A humble man works in the curia of Buenos Aires. He has worked there for 30 years, he is the father of eight children. Before he goes out, before going out to do the things that he must do, he always says: ‘Jesus!’ And I once asked him: ‘Why do you always say Jesus?’ ‘When I say Jesus’- this humble man told me – ‘I feel strong, I feel I can work, and I know that He is with me, that He keeps me safe’.”

Pope Francis continued: “This man never studied theology, he only has the grace of Baptism and the power of the Spirit. And this testimony, did me a lot of good too, because it reminds us that in this world that offers us so many saviours, it is only the name of Jesus that saves.”

Of course you would expect the Holy Father to say that because he is a Jesuit – one of Ignatius’ ‘Jesus Boys’, to be known forever by the Holy Name alone.

If you go into their church in Rome, Il Gesu – the Jesus, and lie on the floor of the nave, you will see the most amazing ceiling. It is a three dimensional masterpiece with the demons and the wicked cascading downwards while the faithful, led by the bambini, the children, ascend ever upward toward the glorious light of heaven.

That light is inscribed with the name of JESUS.

All of these are reminders of the power of the Name.

This morning's reading tells us of what ancient origin this power lies. The Sanhedrin demands that the Apostles, only recently miraculously released from prison, stop preaching in the name of Jesus – scarcely surprising when several thousand in Jerusalem had already turned to Christ as a result of preaching Jesus.

'You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching', the High Priest complains. 'Stop preaching in the Name of Jesus'.

Eighty years later the Roman governor of Bithynia will write to the Emperor Trajan to ask his advice on dealing with those who own the name of Christ. He has got rather tired of executing them.

Pliny is unable to find anything immoral with which to charge them. Indeed, after torturing deaconesses, he discovers that they sing hymns to Jesus and promise to pay their debts, never steal, lie or commit adultery and then eat together. Innocent of anything immoral or illegal,

Pliny wonders if it is enough that they claim the name of Christ.

It is.

Such is the power of the Name.

At the Name of Jesus, demons flee.

At the Name of Jesus salvation may be found.

At the Name of Jesus wandering wilful Man turns back to God and in repentance and reconciliation finds peace and restoration and life eternal.

Christians can never cease to proclaim the Name of Jesus.

As the Apostles tell the rulers of the Sanhedrin,  
'Obedience to God comes before obedience to men'.

And here there is an unfortunate edit in the lectionary – part of the text is omitted. Scripture tells us that the Sanhedrin ordered that the Apostles be flogged before being released. Hence the final line that says 'they were glad to have had the honour of suffering for the sake of the Name.'

Witnessing, martyrdom, has its price. Rejection, persecution, abuse, beating, death – but Jesus will never abandon His faithful and it is our privilege to carry His Holy Name to the ends of the earth.

Talking about religion converts no-one. Introducing them to Jesus does. To quote the number one JESUS BOY, Pope Francis, in his recent homily ‘Let us trust in the name of Jesus, let us invoke the name of Jesus, and let the Holy Spirit push us to pray trusting in the name of Jesus ... it will do us all good. Only Jesus saves, and we must bear witness to this! Jesus is the only one.’”

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