

Feast of the Holy Name

The Holy Name

"His name was called Jesus" (Luke, 2:21)

The Gospel of today is the same as that read on New Year's Day, and though brief, it contains many lessons. Today we shall concentrate on the name given to the Divine Infant, because today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name.

The name *Jesus* signifies *Saviour*, and is so appropriate to the Divine Babe of Bethlehem that God Himself signified His desire that it be given to His Son in human nature. For, when the angel spoke to Joseph announcing that his wife was to have a Son through the operation of the Holy Ghost, he said, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for He shall save his people from their sins" (*Matt.*, 1:21).

Because the name of Jesus signifies so great a blessing on mankind--our salvation through His suffering and death--and because the person who bears it is true God, the Catholic Church calls this name *the Holy Name*. The liturgy of the Church shows special veneration to this name, for it commands that when the priest recites the name of Jesus in the Mass, he shall bow. When a group of priests or religious are solemnly reciting the Divine Office (as in some of the cathedrals of Europe) they are commanded to remove their birettas when they pronounce this Name. Similarly, the Church wishes the laity to bow when they recite or hear this Holy Name, except when they are already kneeling in prayer.

It is indeed shocking to hear the name of Jesus used profanely, as an interjection of surprise or anger. Yet, this is the custom of many who (strange to say) seem to think that it is a manifestation of manliness to make use of this Holy Name so lightly. It is especially deplorable when this is done by Catholics. Those who have no faith in the divinity of Our Lord can be partially excused by their ignorance, but there is no excuse when a Catholic who knows that Jesus Christ is true God and the Saviour of all mankind uses the name of his Divine Master carelessly and even disrespectfully. It is true, the use of the Holy Name in vain is generally not a mortal sin, but it is a venial sin and can become a mortal sin when it is a cause of scandal or when it involves deliberate disrespect for Our Lord.

Practical Application

Ask yourself honestly today whether you are showing the Holy Name the respect which you should manifest. Those men in the congregation who are not as yet members of the Holy Name Society should also ask themselves whether they have a sufficient reason for not joining this society, pledged to honour the name of God and to encourage a practical Catholic life.