

LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

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LENT AND EASTER: THE SEARCH FOR QUIET

When the Prophet Isaiah relates the consolations God has promised His people, he says, *“In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.”* (Is. 29:18) When John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask whether Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, Jesus replies, *“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear....”* (Mt. 11:4)

In my family, the grown-ups were “hard of hearing,” so I was not surprised to find myself, one day, in a doctor’s office being fitted for a pair of hearing aids. What a difference they make! At the same time, I am newly aware how much noise surrounds us: not just sounds of birds and rustling leaves, but the annoying, mechanical chirps from computer games fellow passengers play as we ride the bus together. I am grateful not to ask others to repeat themselves, but I look forward to returning to my room, removing my hearing aids, and no longer hearing quite so clearly the sound of the nearby freeway.

Perhaps because I have never expected to find myself in prison, I have always imagined Solitary Confinement to resemble the seclusion embraced by Carthusian monks. My readers may imagine my surprise when I read a recent editorial (February 21, 2014) in the New York Times by the Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Corrections. He wondered whether Solitary Confinement (now termed “Administrative Segregation”) is overused, and whether alternatives should be considered. To help form his opinion, he spent a night in “Ad Seg”.

Rather than an experience of dark and quiet, he found himself

...immersed in a drone of garbled noise – other inmates’ blaring TVs, distant conversations, shouted arguments. I couldn’t sense of any of it, and was left feeling twitchy and paranoid. I kept waiting for the lights to turn off to signal the end of the day, but the lights did not shut off....

Compare this to St. Thomas Aquinas’ description of hell. When asked whether the damned exist in material darkness, he replies



Silhouette by Sr. Jean Dorcy, O.P.

The disposition of hell will be such as to be adapted to the utmost unhappiness of the damned...accordingly both light and darkness are there, insofar as they are conducive to the unhappiness of the damned. Now seeing is in itself pleasant...Yet it happens...that seeing is painful, when we see things that are hurtful to us, or displeasing to our will. Consequently in hell the place must be so disposed for seeing...that nothing be seen clearly, and that only such things be dimly seen as are able to bring anguish to the heart....” (Supp. 97.5)

If such punishment awaits the sight of the damned, we may shudder to consider what torments will afflict their hearing.

Our newspapers carry daily reports of violent uprisings in various corners of the world, and we can imagine the noise that accompanies them. Violence is seldom a quiet enterprise, and if we look at the gospel accounts of Good Friday, they reveal an all-too-familiar cacophony, with each of the evangelists recording the crowd’s shouting, “Crucify him!” By contrast, the Book of Genesis relates God’s bringing everything into existence with only a calm and ordered voice. Voices raised in anger, insult and contempt are altogether a human invention, a sign of how far we fell, and how quickly, when we learned to dissemble in the Garden.

If we substitute “heaven” and “hell” for “calm” and “noise,” we get a very good idea of what our options are during Lent, and the blessing the Church calls us to

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Ten Commandments: III THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain"

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A Twentieth-Century Church leader once observed the most beautiful word in any language is our name, spoken with love. At a first hearing, this may seem like nothing more than the sentimental greeting we read on a Valentine card, but if we give the reflection deeper thought, we realize it says a great deal about the importance of names, the value they convey if we treat them with respect, and – by contrast – the disdain we show both the name and the name-bearer when we treat a name with contempt.

THE HOLINESS OF A NAME

Our *Catechism* teaches

God calls each one by name. Everyone's name is sacred. The name is the icon of the person. It demands respect as a sign of the dignity of the one who bears it. (#2158)

The Church regards names so highly that, until recently, children could not be baptized with a name other than the name of a saint, or a name associated with some aspect of the faith. These rules have been considerably relaxed, but those who present infants for Baptism are still encouraged to ponder the significance of the child's name.

In Baptism, the Lord's name sanctifies man, and the Christian receives his name in the Church. This can be the name of a saint, that is, of a disciple who has lived a life of exemplary fidelity to the Lord. The patron saint provides a model of charity; we are assured of his intercession. The "baptismal name" can also express a Christian mystery or Christian virtue. "Parents, sponsors, and the pastor are to see that a name is not given which is foreign to Christian sentiment." (Catechism, #2156, Code of Canon Law, #855)

We may not – or may not often – consider this, but we begin and end our prayers with a name: *"the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."* Calling upon the names of the Persons of the Trinity not only sanctifies the activities of our day, but, the *Catechism* reminds us (#2157), affords us strength and consolation in difficult times and when we face temptation.

AN ETERNAL NAME

We may not like the name our parents gave us, so we have reason to rejoice that God has also given us a name.

The name one receives is a name for eternity. In the kingdom, the mysterious and unique character of each person marked with God's name will shine forth in splendor. "To him who conquers...I will give a white stone, with a new name written on [it], which

no one knows except him who receives it...Then I looked, and Lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him [those] who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." (#2159)

The imagery quoted above, from the Book of Revelation, is wrapped in mystery, but one element of the passage is quite clear: the God who endowed each of us with an immortal soul has no trouble identifying us. If we remain faithful to His name, we may look forward to bearing that name as an everlasting adornment.

BIBLICAL NAMES

Let us keep these thoughts in mind as we consider the second of the Ten Commandments, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." These initial reflections, which tell us something of the importance of our names, will provide the context in which we shall locate all our further reflections on this commandment, which tells us a great deal about the immense significance of God's name. To begin to understand this, we need to contrast the casual attitude we express toward names in our present day to the reverence with which names were held in Biblical times.

The modern age appreciates names for their commercial value, and we are surrounded by exotic "brand" names invented to stick in our minds when we go shopping. Parents name children for nobler reasons, but even these names do not begin to express the value of names as they are revealed to us in the Bible.

In the Old Testament Book of Genesis, (2.20) we are told *"The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field."* These names were not simply the names we give pets; these names conveyed something of the nature – the underlying reality – of the animals. The *Anchor Bible* commentary observes,

Names were regarded not only as labels but also as symbols, magical keys as it were to the nature and essence of the given being or thing. (vol 1, p. 16)

What is more, when God gave the first man the privilege of naming the animals, He gave our First Parent not only the ability to confer something of the nature of the animals he named, He gave him power and control over them.

OUR NAMES

Now, think for a moment how we use names. Whom do we address by a first name? Who addresses *us* by our first name? This will be key to understanding what is at stake when we use God's name. Times change, of course, and the latter part of the Twentieth Century ushered in an age of great informality. But custom demands we address

some individuals by a title. The Pope will always be “Your Holiness,” and until we are invited to do otherwise, we will call a member of the US Senate, “Senator.” We expect our peers to address us by our first names, but we may reasonably be surprised (and annoyed) if someone much younger than we does so, rather than employing “Mister,” “Mrs.,” “Miss,” “Ms.,” or another conventional title, such as “Doctor” or “Professor.”

GOD’S NAME: “I AM”

If we take such care with *our* names, what care ought we to take with *God’s*? To appreciate this question fully, we must understand what a privilege we have been given to *know* God’s name. At the beginning of the Book of Exodus (2.13), Moses encounters God in a burning bush. In the course of their conversation, God commands Moses to return to Egypt and bid Pharaoh to liberate the Israelites from their slavery. Moses asks what he is to say when the Egyptians ask, “*The God of your fathers... what is his name?*”

REFLECTIONS OF THE FATHERS

God replied, “*I am who I am... Say this to the people... I AM sent me.*” This does not correspond to any name we are familiar with, but the early writers of our Church explained that “I am” expresses very precisely God’s nature. St. Gregory Nazianzus wrote when God told Moses to say, “*I AM sent me,*” He described Himself as altogether self-sufficient, “*a nature whose is absolute and not bound up with something else....*”

St. Hilary likewise found the name “I am” to be an apt reflection of God’s eternity. He remarked

It is known that there is nothing more characteristic of God than to be, because that itself which is does not belong to those things which will one day end or to those things which had a beginning... And since the eternity of God will not be untrue to itself in anything, he has revealed to us in a fitting manner this fact alone, that he is.... (On the Trinity, Bk. 1, Chap. 5)

St. Augustine treats God’s name at some length in a number of sermons and other writings. Like the other Fathers, he argues that God’s saying He “is” means He is eternal and does not change. “*Things which change are not, because they do not last. What is, abides.*” Augustine then concludes God’s eternity is the underlying foundation that supports all creation, “*...the other things which exist could not exist except by him, and these things are good insofar as they have received the ability to be.*”

GOD’S NAME IN PRAYER

Obviously, we do not think about all this when we pray, but when we address God in our prayers, we assume a great deal; we not only address God by a title, we address Him by name. Doing so presumes He will attend our call, and listen to what we have to say. To use His name in such a familiar manner expresses our belief God will listen to us (and respond) with all the wisdom, love, justice, and mercy He has revealed of Himself. To use God’s name is no small gift, and our *Catechism* reminds us how highly we ought to value it,

Among all the words of Revelation, there is one which is unique: the revealed name of God. God confides his name to those who believe in him; he reveals himself to them in his personal mystery. The gift of a name belongs to the order of trust and intimacy. “The Lord’s name is holy.” For this reason man must not abuse it. He must keep it in mind in silent, loving adoration. He will not introduce it into his own speech except to bless, praise, and glorify it. (#2143)

To call God by name is to summon into our presence the creator of everything we can see or imagine, the all-caring Being who keeps the universe in order, and, Jesus assures us, marks the death of even the smallest birds. (Mt. 10:29) The *Catechism* summarizes all we have considered thus far when it observes,

Respect for his name is an expression of the respect owed to the mystery of God himself and to the whole sacred reality it evokes. (#2144)

TAKING GOD’S NAME IN VAIN

Because the proper use of God’s name is so uplifting and moral an act, we can easily discern how wicked is the misuse of God’s name, which is forbidden by the Second Commandment. And here our *Catechism* (#2146) reminds us the prohibition against abusing God’s name extends to those closest to God, and forbids “*every improper use of the names of... Jesus Christ... the Virgin Mary and all the saints.*” This underlines the community that is one of the characteristics of the Church. We do not have license to pick and choose among the individuals we will honor. The Second Commandment orders us to honor all those who belong to God; those closest to Him deserve greater respect, but each of God’s creatures bears some trace of its Creator, so every creature deserves our regard.

OATHS: TRUE & FALSE

How, we may ask, do we take God’s name in vain? If we make a promise to another, asking God to be our witness, this promise takes on a special character. The dictionary defines such a promise as an oath,

A solemn, formal declaration or promise to fulfill a pledge, often calling upon God... as witness.

To understand what this involves, we need only think of the promise a juror makes “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.” To call upon God to witness an action gives the action an exalted, sacred character. For this reason, marriage vows and the vows of religious profession invoke God as a witness. To be released from such vows requires special legal investigation and action on the part of the Church; to break such promises, or violate these vows, is seriously sinful.

What is at issue here is our defining and presenting an action as something important enough to invite God to be a part of it. The *Catechism* expresses how very serious a matter this is when it states

Taking an oath or swearing is to take God as a witness to what one affirms. It is to invoke the divine truthfulness as a pledge of one’s own truthfulness... Human speech is either in accord with or in opposition

to God who is Truth itself. When it is truthful and legitimate, an oath highlights the relationship of human speech with God's truth. A false oath calls on God to be witness to a lie. (#2150, 2151)

To lie is bad enough, but the *Catechism* directs us to the First Letter of St. John, in which the Apostle speaks of our walking in the light (1 Jn 1:10) but warns that if we are unfaithful, we make God out to be a liar.

PERJURY

An example of such infidelity is perjury, which we commonly understand from courtroom dramas as telling a lie—or offering misleading testimony—under oath. However, the *Catechism* defines perjury in much broader terms

A person commits perjury when he makes a promise under oath with no intention of keeping it, or when after promising on oath he does not keep it. Perjury is a grave lack of respect for the Lord of all speech. (#2152)

God brought creation into existence by speaking. He shared the unique gift of speech with us so we might imitate Him and bring order to the world—with our words. God's human creatures have a fundamental right to trust one another's words. If we misuse them, our perjury is a sin against our fellow humans. What is worse, it is a deliberate eradication of the God in whose image we were created.

BLASPHEMY

Another way we take God's name in vain is blasphemy, which our *Catechism* defines as

...uttering against God – inwardly or outwardly – words of hatred, reproach, or defiance; in speaking ill of God; in failing in respect toward him in one's speech; in misusing God's name...[this] extends to language against Christ's Church, the saints, and sacred things. (#2148)

This definition gives blasphemy a somewhat exalted character, and we may be tempted to imagine it beyond the capacity of the common run of humankind. But think of the many times individuals utter Jesus' name in frustration or, in anger, ask God to "damn" someone or something. These examples show how commonplace blasphemy is, how easily it can become an habitual part of everyday speech, and how carefully we must guard against it.

DEVALUING GOD'S NAME

The Second Commandment also forbids any use of God's name as a pledge to commit some wrong, or in an attempt to work a magic spell. Likewise, we should not ask God to witness merely trivial agreements. God's name is holy, and not to be used casually. Our *Catechism* observes

...God's presence and his truth must be honored in all speech. Discretion in calling upon God is allied with a respectful awareness of his presence, which all our assertions either witness to or mock. (#2153)

THE EXAMPLE OF MARY

When we look for a model of reverence for God's name, we need look no further than Mary. She is our example in

all things, so we should hardly be surprised to find her our guide in this. Mary says very little in the gospel, but what she says is very telling. Her *Magnificat* is a breath-taking catalogue of God's glories, and one of the first she mentions is the holiness of His name.

He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. (Lk 1:49)

The Second Commandment provides a grim reminder of the many ways we can disregard or abuse God's name. Those who are friends of the Dominican Order through the work of the Rosary Center may recall that one of the Order's mottos is *Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare*—“to praise, to bless, and to preach.” Like Mary's few, ecstatic words, this motto remind us what true nobility our speech is capable of, and the highest use we can make of it. ■

LENT AND EASTER (cont. from page 1)

choose during this holy season. Let us take advantage of these forty days – as well as the Church's sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist – to draw closer to the Jesus who took on our flesh so he could sanctify and redeem it. On the cross.

NEWS OF FR. DUFFNER

The Rosary Center's beloved Paul Duffner will celebrate his 99th birthday in April. Although Fr. Duffner “retired” from active duty as Director of the Center in 2004, he has never given up his interest in the Rosary Confraternity or the ministry of the Rosary Center. Despite the health setbacks one might expect a near-centenarian to experience, Fr. Duffner continues to come to the Rosary Center each day, and to enter – by hand – the name of each person who wishes to enroll in the Confraternity!

LOOKING FOR A NEW CHILD'S BOOK?

We are quite pleased to offer *The Miracle of the Dancing Sun at Fatima*, an interactive, devotional and doctrinal book designed to broaden the faith of young people. Although it is presented as a “companion” to the animated film *The Day the Sun Danced*, the book can be enjoyed by itself, and its clever question and answer format is quite engaging.

In the course of her encounters with the young children at Fatima, the Blessed Mother instructed them in the necessity of receiving the Eucharist and the value of praying the Rosary. The text makes clear and simple presentations of these truths, and follows each of them with quizzes and prayers to help the message “stick.”

OLD FAVORITES REVISITED

We are very happy we can once again make available Fr. Brian Mullady's cd, *Conscience: Preparing for Lent*. This has proven a best-seller in the past, as it helps the faithful Catholic appreciate the season's call to a change of heart, and the unsurpassed value of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a spiritual aid on this quest.

The *Dominican Mission Manual* is an excellent, pocket-sized resource for the holy season of Lent. It contains numerous prayers, as well as a non-threatening examination of conscience that offers superb guidance for those preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.