

To The Triune God  
Christ the Redeemer and Ruler of All,  
The Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, Our Seraphic Father Saint Francis, to all the  
Saints,  
Honour, Praise, and Glory.  
To us, peace and goodwill.

January, a month of holiday, relaxation, cricket and kids running around the malls, is traditionally the month dedicated to the Most Holy Name of Jesus. As Franciscans we observe this Memorial of the Holy Name on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January. As Franciscans we inherit a tradition of devotion to the Holy Name. We only have to think of St. Bernadine of Siena who was a great preacher of this devotion to Our Lord. “The name of Jesus that makes us children of God, is a firm foundation of faith. The Faith of the Catholic religion is based upon knowledge and recognition of Jesus Christ who is the light of the soul, the gateway to life, the foundation of eternal life.” (Works of St. Bernadine, *On the eternal Gospel*.)

St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians (2:5-11), “That at Jesus’ Name every knee must bend in the Heavens, on the earth.” In the Gospel of St. Matthew we read of how the Angel speaks to St. Joseph and tells him that the Son of God will be called Jesus because He will save His People from their sins. Devotion to the Holy Name reinforces our understanding of who Jesus is for us. He is not some feel good guru, or a prophet. He is the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, true God, true man, Our Lord and Saviour, of whom St. Francis declares:

“And we give You thanks because just as you created us through your Son, so in that true and holy love with which You have loved us did you have Him true God and true Man, be born of the glorious and most blessed Holy Mary ever Virgin and wish us captives to be redeemed through his Cross and Blood and death”.

In the Church’s rubrics the celebrant and liturgical ministers are instructed to bow their head at Holy Name during the liturgical prayers. We worship with our bodies as an expression of our interior aspiration to unite our hearts and minds with Almighty God. After Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament we repeat the Divine Praises and say “Blessed be the Holy Name of Jesus.” Thus the Church, through the holy Liturgy, instructs us to have reverence for the Holy Name as we remember the commandment of God, “You shall not take the name of the Lord Your God in vain.”

During Christmas I always try and watch an old favourite film of mine, “the Bells of St Mary’s”. There is a cute scene when the little children of the school are rehearsing their nativity play for Sr. Benedict and Fr. O’ Mally. At it’s conclusion they sing ‘Happy Birthday’ to Jesus and make a bow of the head at the mention of the Holy Name. How beautiful! How good it is for us to teach reverence for the Holy Name to our children. We live in a society where God and all that is holy are often mocked, especially through the media. The Holy Name is too frequently invoked not in respect or prayer but in anger or cursing. As Franciscans let us always defend the Holy Name of Jesus.

Whenever we hear the Holy Name being abused let us repeat in our hearts “Blessed be the Holy Name of Jesus”. During the day let us often invoke the Holy Name for His help in all things and to glorify Christ through our actions and works. May the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary be always on our lips with devotion, especially at the hour of death.

During the beginning of January we of course continue in the Christmas Season and celebrate the solemnity of the Lord’s Epiphany. When we celebrate this manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles through the visit of the Magi, we are reminded how Christ as Saviour came for the salvation of all people. Like the Wise men we are called to offer the gifts of our minds, hearts and souls to the Christ-child, who offers us His peace, grace and love. The Epiphany therefore is an exchange of human love with the Divine. Yet the Divine Love is conveyed through a human heart of a Child. It was the humility of this Divine Love in a human heart that enraptured the heart of St. Francis. The same Divine Love Francis beheld on the Cross, and adored on the Altar! Again, there are many beautiful customs we can employ to mark this feast which has always been dear to Franciscans, such as the exchange of gifts, the blessing of homes and re-dedication of homes to Our Lord Jesus Christ as our King! Many communities may celebrate the Epiphany by the assignment of patron saints for each member of the fraternity for the coming year, with a brief saying from the Gospel and the name of a deceased brother or sister to pray for, given to each person.

The Three kings offered gifts to the Christ-child. Maybe we can share gifts with the needy here, and overseas. Let us especially remember our most vulnerable brothers and sisters, the unborn. Let us resolve to be apostles of the Gospel of Life. Some good spiritual reading for us can be *Evangelium Vitae*, the Gospel of life of Pope John Paul II. Abortion is the most terrible scourge in our society. It is anti-life, anti-women, and anti-God. At Kellyville the Conventual Franciscan Friars have a monthly Mass in reparation for abortion and sins against life. We also pray for healing and mercy for all those involved in this tragedy. How are we as fraternities facing the culture of death? How can we as Franciscans respond to this challenge?

May the adoration of the Magi lead us always to adore Our Lord, especially in the Blessed Sacrament, and let Him be truly the King of our hearts. As the Magi found Jesus with His Mother may we too always be conscious of Our Lady’s motherly presence in our lives. May the Holy Mother of God and St. Joseph our Protector, intercede for us that 2010 will be a year in which we truly know the goodness of the Lord!

God love You - Br Louis Mary OFM Conv.