

JANUARY 3, 2025 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

I remember visiting a grade 2 class one day and a student asking me if Jesus had a last name. Just then, another boy quickly jumped in and attempted to help his friend. He said, "His name is 'Christ'. That's why we call him 'Jesus Christ'." I thought that was quite funny, and it certainly put a big smile on my face. So with a gentle smile I told him, "Christ isn't Jesus' last name.

Christ means 'anointed' because Jesus was anointed Messiah who came to save us." I further explained, "In those days, people didn't have last names. Instead, where they came from was more important. So they called Jesus of Nazareth, Paul of Tarsus, Peter of Bethsaida, Joseph of Arimathea." At first, the students had a confused look about them, but after some examples they seemed to have understood. Names have meaning. Especially names from the Bible.

So when parents name their child I'm sure they think about what they want their child to be when they grow up, and try to match the name that they could aspire to when they grow up. In the Bible, there are instances where God changed a person's name from Abram to Abraham, from Sarai to Sarah, from Jacob to Israel, from Simon to Peter. When the name was given, when the new name that is, along with the new name came a mission to fulfil. I really like the explanation Bishop Fulton Sheen gave when he was talking about Simon, Simon Peter. Simon Peter was called Peter, a rock. Not because he was a rock but that he should become a solid character and a leader, and become a rock. Peter was called to grow into the name that Jesus gave to him. So now, what about the name of Jesus? What's in the name of Jesus?

Jesus is derived from a Hebrew name Yeshua meaning 'God is salvation' or 'God saves'. Jesus' name reveals his identity and his mission. Jesus was sent to us by the Father to complete God's mission to save us from

sin in death at the cost of his life. That is why in today's gospel St. John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the lamb of God, the sacrificial lamb who was sacrificed on behalf of their sins, to atone for their sins. Jesus is not only the promised Messiah but he is also the incarnate Son of the Father who is God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. God's name is Holy and we should always use God's name to give Him thanks and praise. And we should do it very often. In the Philippines we read, "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven, and on Earth, and under the earth. And every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

The only time we should speak of Jesus' name should be in the context of prayer and praise. Apart from Jesus' name being holy, the second point is that there is power in the name of Jesus. In the gospel of John, Jesus said, "If you ask me anything in my name I will do it." Jesus told us to pray and ask in his name. Times I found myself anxious, afraid, or worried and prayed in the name of Jesus, God always answered my prayers. There's power in the name of Jesus because Jesus has fought the battle and won. Jesus told his disciples, "All these signs will accompany those who believe. In my name they will cast out demons. They will speak in new tongues. They will pick up serpents with their hands. And if they drink any deadly poison it will not hurt them. They will lay their hands on the sick and they'll recover." What Jesus was able to do, and did, he empowered his disciples to do. To heal the sick, to drive off demons, and all in the name of Jesus. There's a real power in the name of Jesus. When you feel you are being tempted or attacked by the enemy, and you invoke the Holy name of Jesus, the devil flees. Jesus is the victor and Jesus shares his power and authority with us when we invoke his holy name.

Something that never ceases to amaze me is celebrating the Mass and giving Absolution at Confession. You see, when Priests pray the words of Consecration, "This is my body, this is my blood," the bread and the wine turns to Jesus himself. When I say, "I absolve you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," God's mercy instantly forgives the sins of the penitent, and sin doesn't exist anymore. God is more than happy to share His love, His power, and His victory with us. We just need to believe and invoke His holy name.

People who know me well know that I have super powers, they are stubbornness and self-reliance. It is always easier to rely on myself than having to work with others and rely on others, including God. But there is no way we are going to make it to Heaven on our own by our efforts alone. St. Paul was a very wise man. In his second letter to St. Timothy he wrote, "I fought the good fight, I finished the race, I have kept the faith." We are called not to give up but to fight the good fight and finish the race. We don't have to win every fight. We don't have to win every race. Jesus has already done that. Jesus already won the fight, he won the race. Jesus is a victor. Learn to depend on him. Praise him and thank him each and every day, and invoke his name. He will always be there for you.