

JANUARY 3 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

The Holy Name of Jesus

I remember hearing a story about a lady named Mary who was walking to work on a cold day in December many years ago. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed a little boy who was standing in front of a shoe store barefoot. He was peering through the window and shivering with cold. She walked over to him and asked, “Are you looking for something?” He replied, “I was asking God to give me a pair of shoes.” She felt so bad for him that she simply couldn’t ignore him and walk away. So Mary took him by the hand and went into the store. Seeing how dirty his feet were she asked for a basin of water from the clerk and washed the boy’s dirty feet and dried them with a towel. She then picked out a pair of socks and a pair of shoes and put them on his feet. Seeing how happy the boy was made Mary very happy. She realized that she was going to be late for work so she paid the bill and said her good bye. As she was walking away the boy quickly caught up to her and gently grabbed her hand. When she looked back, with tears in his eyes the boy asked, “Can you tell me who you are? Are you God’s wife?” With a gentle smile she replied, “No I am not, but I am God’s daughter!”

Mary’s act of kindness reminded the little boy of God’s love that he thought she was God’s wife. The truth is we are all related to God. We are His children! And that makes all of us brothers and sisters in Christ!

In celebrating the feast day of the Holy Name of Jesus we are not only honouring God’s holy name, but also remembering what He did for us! God saved us! And that’s what the name ‘Jesus’ means! God saves! In today’s Gospel, John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and that he witnessed the Holy Spirit descend on Him as a dove. In the baptism of Jesus, God the Father affirmed His Son’s identity and Mission. Through Baptism Jesus shares His identity and His relationship with God the Father with us. Baptism made us part of God’s family, as His children who are given inheritance which is eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

I remember back in 2006, a few days after I was ordained a Priest, I went to the Pauline sisters to buy a few things I needed for my ministry. The reality of having become a priest was so new that the reality hasn't sunken in yet. At least for the first few weeks, every time someone called me "Father" I would look around to see who the person was talking to. Being called "Father," felt so unfamiliar and strange at first. I knew the Ordination to the Priesthood changed me because I was no longer Peter, but Fr. Peter! So going back to the story. While I was shopping, a lady holding a bible and a rosary came to me and said that she wanted to get them blessed. Quickly I looked around to see if there was any priest in the store. After a quick glance I told her, "I am sorry I can't find any priest in the store." Looking confused she walked away. Then it dawned on me! She was asking me to bless her religious articles because I am a Priest. Realizing this I quickly ran up to her and said, "Excuse me. I forgot that I am a priest. I can bless them for you right now." Instead of allowing me to bless them she took one step back while clutching her stuff and said, "No thank you," and then she quickly walked away. I knew what she was thinking. She thought I was crazy! She was probably wondering how can you not know that you are a priest? How can we not know who we are? And if we don't know who we are, how can we fulfil the mission that God gave us? Unfortunately, I think the reality is that sometimes we forget who we really are! We forget that we are God's children first, and that our identity and self-worth comes from God, and not from the world or opinions of others!

Many years ago when I turned 16 and got a driver's license my father would let me take his car on the weekend to hang out with my friends. Our favourite hangout places were fast food restaurants and movie theaters. I was a good driver but I took extra caution to make sure I didn't get any speeding tickets or get into an accident. Because I knew that along with the privilege and freedom of being able to use Dad's car came responsibility and accountability. In the same way, the privilege of being called children of God means that we have to be responsible with our actions and choices. We have to make conscious decisions and make an effort to give honour to God.

When Jesus sent His disciples by themselves on their missionary journey, the disciples very quickly found out that the name of Jesus had authority and power. By invoking Jesus's name they were able to cure the sick and drive out unclean spirits. Jesus shares that very same authority and power that He entrusted to His apostle with all of us. We should always have confidence that God is with us, even when we don't feel His presence.

I recently saw a short video of a 6 year old boy from Brazil who was trapped alone in an elevator. Being too small to reach the elevator buttons, he got a little scared. He knelt down and prayed, "Lord, please open the door. I'm a little scared but I know you are with me." As soon as the boy finished saying "Amen," the door instantly opened. Soon after the door opened the boy was seen leaving the elevator. It almost seemed like a miracle to me, but what is most important is that this boy had faith and confidence that God would never abandon him and that He would come to rescue him in time of need. I can honestly tell you from my experience that God has never let me down. Of course I can't always understand God and His ways, and that's because I am a mere creature and He is almighty and all knowing God! So in the meantime, even if we can't see or feel His presence, let us have the confidence of this boy, knowing that we can always call upon God and rely on Him.