

*And thou shall call him Jesus.*

“The name of Jesus is a divine name”, writes St. Alphonsus Ligouri, because it was announced to Mary on the part of God by his messenger St. Gabriel as we heard in the Gospel today. It is *THE name above every name* according to St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians. More importantly, it is the name which alone salvation is found according St. Peter in the Acts of the Apostles: *There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.*

St. Bernard says the Holy Name of Jesus, then, is light to the mind, food to the heart and medicine to the soul.

It is light to the mind. By this name the world was converted from the darkness of idolatry to the light of faith. We who have been born after the life, death and resurrection of Christ should be grateful because the Jewish people spent 2000 years in darkness, death and suffering waiting for their Savior. Our Savior, and the Church he instituted for the salvation of the world is over 2,000 years old with a history of unchangeable truths, and treasure of theological reflection. We live with the knowledge and truth of the passion, death and resurrection of our Savior, and the opportunity and the responsibility to live as children of the light.

Many of us are living the faith because someone shared it with us; someone inspired us with wisdom or we witnessed their living of the faith; or invited us to become Catholic. Faith is everything to us, or it should be! Why? Because he who believes is not lost. Our Blessed Lord’s words in his great commissioning of the Apostles prove this: *he who believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned.*

Are we grateful? Are we faithful? How is our life of faith as we reflect on the most unusual year of 2020?

The name of Jesus is also food that nourishes our hearts. How? The name of Jesus should remind us of what God has done to save us. St. Alphonsus says that our prayer life should include at least 15 minutes every day of meditating on the Passion of Our Lord, staring at a crucifix as a reminder of the unfathomable love Our Lord has for us. That is why we adorn our Churches, homes, offices, rear view mirrors and necks with a Crucifix. It is a horrifying image, really, but at the same time it is the reminder of the greatest act of love the world will ever see. There is a person nailed to that tree, and he has a name!

That name should console us because there is mercy for our transgressions and our failings; it should give us strength and perseverance in times of trial because the history of man has never seen the kind of tribulation like the Lord’s passion and death; it should give us strength to walk along the way of salvation, which is the climb up Calvary.

Our lives can be hard, but not as hard as his, from the moment of his conception he took upon himself all the past, current and future sins of mankind! Is there any burden greater than this?

The holy name of Jesus is food that gives us courage, and my goodness do we ever need courage to be Catholic today in a world that is becoming increasingly hostile to us! Who suffered more spitting, name calling and rejection during his life than Jesus?

And finally, the name of Jesus is food that inflames our hearts with pure love of our Redeemer, who loves us and gives himself us for us; yes, at Calvary but over and over and over again at the Sacred banquet. He and only he is our path to everlasting life. He is the way, the truth and the life.

How is the name of Jesus medicine to our soul? It renders our souls strong against the temptations and vicious attacks of our enemy. And boy is hell unleashing everything they have at us these days. It is open, all out spiritual warfare.

“Devils tremble and fly at the invocation of this holy name”, says St. Alphonsus. St. Paul attests to his: *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth and under the earth.* Whoever calls on the name of Jesus shall not fall, and he who constantly invokes him shall not fall, and shall be saved. As the psalmist cries *praising, I will call upon the Lord; and I shall be saved from my enemies.*

Who was ever lost, who when he was tempted invoked Jesus, asks St. Alphonsus? In the past year of craziness, the political turmoil, the moral decay, the upheaval of our daily life, the suffering and the terrible temptations to sinfully act out our anger and anxiety, how did we respond? A close priest friend calls the Coronavirus the Wuhan Devil—and upon reflection I think he hit a bullseye because our enemy, if anything sews discord and division. He is winning that battle even now. Have we called on the Holy Name of Jesus enough to avoid getting sucked into the devil’s cauldron?

The good news for today, not because it is New Year’s Day in the Julian Calendar—a day traditional for hangovers and new resolutions. Rather, on this the Feast of the Circumcision, our life as Christians is a life of constant conversion, not daily but hourly, of continuous new resolutions of turning away from the world and to God; away from sin and death and temptation to the true joy and freedom of a life in Christ.

In reality, the message isn’t complicated—constantly call on the Holy Name of Jesus. It reminds us of who we are, where we are going and what and who we need for the journey: him, and only him.