***Monthly Spiritual Message***

**January 2023**

**THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS**

If you ask many devout and religious men and women, they will tell you that the devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus is reserved to the spirituality of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). However, this is not the case. It belongs to the Franciscan Order, dating back to the time of St Francis.

St Francis' spirituality was so Christ-centred that he had a special devotion to the name of Jesus as well as his special devotion to the Nativity of Our Lord. Both of these devotions lead to each other and remain central to Franciscan Spirituality.

Among the Centenary Celebrations we are focusing upon this year of 2023 is the creation of the first Christmas Crib at Greccio by St Francis.

Thomas of Celano, the biographer of St Francis, writes regarding this experience:

“Then he [Francis] preaches to the people standing around him and pours forth sweet honey about the birth of the poor King and the poor city of Bethlehem. Moreover, burning with excessive love, he often calls Christ “the babe from Bethlehem.” whenever he means to call him Jesus.... He seems to lick his lips whenever he uses the expressions “Jesus” or “babe from Bethlehem”, tasting the word on his happy palate and savouring the sweetness of the word.” (I Cel 30:86)

According to St Bonaventure, St Francis would order his friars to collect and put in a special place any bit of paper bearing the name of Jesus. He later applied this to any piece of paper with writing on it since it might have one of the letters that make up the Holy Name. (Major Legend)

A letter from Francis follows: “To all the custodians of the Lesser Brothers whom this letter reaches, Brother Francis, your servant and little one in the Lord God …. I beg you that, when it is fitting, and you judge it expedient, you humbly beg the clerics to revere above all else the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy names and the written words that sanctify His Body. (First Letter to the Custodians 1220, n.1-2)

Why was St Francis devoted to the Holy Name of Jesus? St Francis’ spirituality was completely Christocentric. Devotion to the Name of Jesus became part of his life and therefore, later, part of Franciscan Spirituality.

The one who stands out the most in Franciscan Spirituality and the Holy Name is St Bernadine of Siena. He once said in a Sermon: “The Holy Name of Jesus is the refuge for the penitent sinner, a refuge full of meekness in which majesty effaces itself, tenderness becomes sweeter, Divine Mercy appears in its grandeur. The name of God is awesome.”

St Bernadine popularized the Monogram of the Holy Name on tablets. The monogram of the Name, YHS – the first three letters of “Jesus” in Greek – is set in a twelve-rayed Sun blazing on a field of blue, surrounded by the text of St Paul, “In nomine Iesu omne genu flectatur, coelestium, terrestrium et infernorum.” (Phil 2:10) “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow; of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth.”

“This is that most holy name longed for by the patriarchs, anxiously awaited, called upon amid cries of suffering, invoked with sighs, implored with tears, given when the fullness of grace arrives” (St Bernardine of Siena).

Jesus died and rose again for the sake of all humanity. No one can trademark or copyright Jesus’ name. Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Mary. We give honour to the name of Jesus not because we think there is any intrinsic power hidden in the letters composing it, but because the name of Jesus reminds us of all the blessings we receive through our Redeemer-God. To give thanks for these blessings, we revere the Holy Name, as we honour our salvation by honouring his Cross. In the name of the Lord, we begin all our consultations.

When we pronounce the name of Jesus, we know little of the treasures hidden in it. The Divine Name in truth is a treasure-trove of grace. Devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus is so easy that everyone without exception can practise it. It can be recited or chanted any time so that even the busiest person can recite it. It consoles the saddest heart and makes the weakest sinner strong. The Name of Jesus fills us with a joy and peace that we never had before. It shows us how to pray without ceasing and at all times. The name of Jesus in prayer is the key to the heart of God.

When we call out the name of Jesus with love, he stops and listens and turns his face towards us. As we begin the New Year of 2023, let us turn to Jesus for guidance in all that we do. May Jesus bless our lives and grant us peace and healing. May we honour and love the name of Jesus in everything we do and witness to in our Franciscan calling.

Happy and Holy New Year!

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