

“Spreading the News of God’s Doings”

The Feast of the Holy Name (Eighth Day of Christmas) - Presided by: Bishop Ariel P. Santos

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“Spreading the News of God’s Doings”
Sunday, January 1, 2017
The Feast of the Holy Name (Eighth Day of Christmas)
Numbers 6: 22 – 27/ Psalm 8/Philippians 2: 5 – 11/ Luke 2: 15 - 21
Bishop Ariel Cornelio P. aSantos

If you are with Christ, it is always Christmas. Christmas won’t be over any time of the year because Christ is always with us.

Today, we celebrate the 8th day of Christmas, the second Sunday of Christmas, but on this day we also celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus. In the Jewish tradition, on the 8th day, the male is circumcised and he is given his name. Jesus’ name came from the Hebrew “Yeshua” which means, “He saves.” God is our salvation. May we be reminded of who Jesus is, what He does, what His name means, what His mission is, and by virtue of this, may we be reminded of our mission.

When Joseph was being anxious of Mary being pregnant and contemplating on divorcing her, the angel appeared to Joseph and told him that the baby was of God, of the Holy Spirit, and that Joseph was to name the baby “Jesus” for He will save people from their sins. Jesus was given the name for a reason: He will save His people from their sins.

A name should have a purpose. As Christians, we don’t just name our children on a whim. We don’t name our children because of pop culture or after a famous celebrity. The name is a prophecy in the life of the child. When you call your children by their name, they are reminded of who they are. Jesus heard His name from His parents and He was constantly reminded, “You are to save Your people from their sins.”

I hope you understand what the meaning of your name is. It is not meaningless. Every time you are called, you are reminded: what your mission in life is; what God is specifically calling you to do. All of us share Christ’s name. We are called Christians. We are His bride, and we take upon His name. His name carries a purpose and mission.

Jesus was born to raise the sons of earth, to give them second birth, and to save the people from their sins. I was reminded of this delegation of John’s disciples whom he sent to Jesus to ask Him, “Are You the expected One? Are we to wait for somebody else?” Jesus said, “Let Me answer your question with another question, “What do you think? You see the people healed; you see the blind seeing; you see the lame walking; you see the deaf hearing; the dumb speaking; you witness the poor hearing the good news preached to them. Am I the expected One?” This is what Jesus does: He saves people from their sins. From the power of sin and death, He delivers them.

Luke 7:29 calls that God's justice. The justice of God is the saving of man from the power of sin and death. Jesus lived up to His Name. St. Peter said to those he was preaching in Acts 2:40, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Jesus saves us from our sin, not from an angry God or not from punishment. What is sin? Sin is that which destroys us, the apple of His eyes. Sin is what destroys the people God loves. If the people God loves are destroyed, He is not going to be angry at His people, but with that which destroys whom He loves. God saves His people from their sins because He loves His people. He will not be angry at them; but He will be angry at those who have malicious intentions and at those who want to destroy that which is His masterpiece, His workmanship, and the apple of His eyes.

God's justice is about destroying what destroys His people and His creation, that is, sin. God's justice is not about punishing His people forever in a place and for being affected by sin. What He will do is to destroy sin, so that His people will be restored. He did this while we were still enemies, while we were hostile to Him. If He would do that while we were still enemies, while we were hostile to Him, what do you think will He do after He has restored us and adopted us as sons? Will He still get angry at us? Will He still be mad at us? No, be reminded about the gospel, "God was in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their sins against them. God loves you. God is not angry at you. God will never leave you nor forsake you." Jesus' name is "He saves." This is His name, His purpose, and His mission. He doesn't abandon. He doesn't give up on us and He does this by offering Himself.

The name of Jesus is synonymous to "love your enemies." He lived up to this. Pray for those who persecute you. Offer the other cheek if someone slaps you. Lose your life for those who are the hardest to love. The King of kings and the Lord of lords came the first time this way – the helpless baby born in a manger, in a very unideal situation. He was the Creator of heaven and earth, but He was not born in a palace, to nobility. He did not have VIPs for guests, but only shepherds. This is how it is done in the Kingdom. The Word of God who spoke the universe into its existence, the Word subjected Himself to inability to speak. He couldn't even say, "Da...da...da..." in the first few days and even months. This was the Word of God; the excellent, brilliant Word of God subjected Himself to speechlessness for us and for our salvation because His Name means "He saves."

The Creator subjected Himself to dependence on His created beings, on His father and His mother. He created all things and then, He subjects Himself to their care. This was the way to save us. This is the way it is in His kingdom. He became helpless and subjected Himself to our helplessness. This is our King. He is the same King who came in meekness, in humility, in non-violence, and He will come again the same way. He will not come back as Rambo as some Christian preachers picture Him. He will come back and reign as a meek, Lamb of God. He came that way the first time; He will come this way again when He returns. His weapon is His incarnation. He will not come with the sword, not with

purple robes, not seated on a material kingly throne, but as a child born to poor parents. His weapon is the word of His mouth. It will be the sword of the good news coming from His mouth. His incarnation is manifesting, visualizing, and actualizing who God is. He is God's final Word. Let us not fail to understand Him. Even if He could use unimaginable force, He did not.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, He told one of His disciples to put their swords away. He said, "Don't you realize I could summon twelve legions of angels and have them consume My enemies?" Jesus did not do this. One angel caused the three shepherds to be terribly frightened. One angel had more firepower than a nuclear bomb. He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus did not call angels nor treat His enemies with violence because this is not so in the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God, you offer the other cheek. In the kingdom of God, it is what I call the "beatitudinal" living.

When Jesus and His disciples were passing through the territory of the Samaritans and they were denied, John asked Jesus, "Do you want to call fire down from heaven and consume these hostile enemies?" Jesus replied, "You do not know what spirit you are of because the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." For thirty years, He was reminded whenever His name was called, "I am to save men's lives." Jesus said, "I did not come to destroy men's lives, but I came to save them." You don't judge who is dumb or not. God does and He doesn't even judge.

In the story of the adulterous woman who was brought to Jesus, Jesus was the only person who was qualified, who was worthy to throw the stone at the woman, but He did not. Psalms 51 says, "You are justified when you speak and blameless when you judge."

The other day, I was reading 1 Corinthians 13, and this one phrase just became alive as if I had not seen it before. It said, "Love is not provoked." As weak human beings, as imperfect human beings, we justify being provoked and we do it by blaming another. We say, "He made me do it. He caused my anger." Love is not provoked because love does not keep a record of wrongs. There is no basis for being provoked. We don't correct aggression with aggression. We don't correct violence with violence. Martin Luther King said that darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do this. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do this. Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs and love overcomes hatred and evil.

Sometime ago, I was given a very wise counsel by a priest. He told me, "At this time, people are hurting. At this time, the name of the game is 'perdigana.'" It comes from the game "dama" and it is the exact opposite of the original dama where that in order to win, one must lose all his pieces, consequently, the player who captures more pieces, loses. I was advised that if people are hurting, what I need to do is to absorb their hurt, their reaction, their anger because they are hurt and they are reacting. Maybe, their reaction is not justified because love should not be provoked, but maybe, they are not there yet. Being

the adult, the mature man, I had to be a shock absorber. I was advised not to assert my reasoning and my own hurt. I had to set it aside. Then, instead of seeking to be understood for my hurt, understand people who are hurting. Don't justify necessarily their reason for their hurt, but understand. Seek to understand more than to be understood. Seek to console more than to be consoled, so that you are channel of God's peace. So that you go and bring love where there is hatred. So that you bring healing where there is hurt. Go and make your blessings flow as far as the curse is found. Just like Jesus, He comes to make His blessings flow as far as the curse is found.

Let us not justify no matter how you have been offended. Romans says that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more because we are to forgive seventy times seven. Remember that we share the name of Jesus. We are Christians, and Jesus' name means He saves. We participate in this mission. Philippians 2 says, "It is for this reason that Jesus' Name is above every name." He rules and reigns by being meek, by being understanding, and by absorbing man's anger and violence. He is not justifying them, but absorbing them, and then speaking in reason.

Humility and obedience are the way for man to reign just like the second Adam, Jesus, showed us. It is not like the Gentiles lording over others, but by subjecting ourselves to others and serving them. In Psalm 8, the psalmist was very awed and asked, "What is man that you would take thought of him? Why do You love us? We are darkness; You are light and there is supposed to be no interaction between the two of us. Why do You reach out?" This is because His name is Jesus; this is because He saves. This is who He is. Why will He set aside His glory? Why will He leave the comfort and the bliss of the right-hand of His Father and be among the people as one of them, suffer with them, go through life with them, and in fact, give His life away from them who were hostile enemies?

A prayer says, "To redeem a slave, You gave up Your Son." Illustrating this with an example of which we may be guilty of, "What did you gift your loved one this Christmas?" For sure, it is something expensive, even to be in debt just to get the gift for your dear, loved one. But what did you give your helper at home? Would you give something precious for them? Would you give your child for their sake? This is confrontational: what if they needed a kidney transplant? Would you volunteer to give one for your helper? What God did was to give up His Son to ransom a slave. This is what God did for us, we, hostile enemies.

Someone who was not in good terms with another person told me, "What is the point of spending time with them or being in the same gathering with them? I will just be a hypocrite." My reaction was, "That is not hypocrisy. That is Christianity. If you can smile at somebody whom you have a difficult time loving, if you can reach out to them even if they are hostile to you, if you can love them, that is Christianity, not hypocrisy." If you love your enemies, you are not being a hypocrite; you are being a Christian. Hypocrisy is

professing to be a Christian and being not like Christ. If you cannot love your enemies, you are being a hypocrite. The nature of God is in you, and when He commands you to love your enemies, He is summoning the Divine nature in you and waking it up for you to act on it and to walk in it.

The book of Numbers says to bless people by invoking the name of God. We don't invoke the name of God by just saying, "Jesus, Jesus!" It is not a charm; a formula; an incantation; not like an Abracadabra or Open Sesame. If we do this without power behind it, we might end up like one of the sons of Sceva in the Book of Acts who did not know Jesus and who tried to use His name on somebody who was demon-possessed. He ended up being attacked by the demon-possessed man and humiliated because he was driven out of the house naked.

What does invoking the name of Jesus really mean? It means walking as He walked; living as He lived; offering the other cheek like He did; loving your enemies like He did; not being a hypocrite to our true nature. This is invoking the name of Jesus and this blesses people – walking in the meaning of the Name of the Lord. Taking the Name of the Lord in vain really means using it not for blessing, but for cursing, or giving an occasion for His enemies to blaspheme by not living up to His name. It is not, "Susmariasep" or "Jesus, what are you doing?" When we misuse it, when we use it for evil, when we have evil desires in our hearts and praying imprecatory prayers, this is taking the name of the Lord in vain. God is good, not evil. His name is for blessing, not for cursing. Jesus' name is God's final Word. Don't fail to understand it.

God's greatest present to us is our life. May we open it fully by invoking Jesus' name into it so that we have life indeed. In doing so, we give back to God the greatest gift we can give. What we are is God's gift to us. What we become is our gift to God. We are the bearers of the Name of Jesus, of Who is, and because of Who He is, it is who we are - meek humble, loving, forgiving, and merciful. This is the Name of Jesus because this is the way it in His kingdom.