

Homily
Holy Name of Jesus – SEEK
Jan. 3, 2025

“When eight days were completed...he was given the name Jesus, the name given him by the angel.” My friends, it’s an awesome thing to stand before so many of you, and to continue to celebrate our Lord’s birth. Today, the Church gives us this feast day of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, and it’s perfect that during this SEEK conference we should celebrate his Holy Name, the name that Paul says is above every other name in heaven, on the earth, and under the earth.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Mary, he said, “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.” And the angel told Joseph to name the child “Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” The name Jesus, or Yeshua, was actually a common name among the people of Israel, and it literally means “God saves.” But in that moment when God became man, when the eternal, all holy God came into our wounded, sinful world, that common name became a divine name. And it’s more than just a name. The name given to this child tells us everything that God would do through him. “God saves.” Jesus is God incarnate, the Word made flesh. He is the One who comes to us once and for all because he loves us. In the person of Jesus, God saves us.

I’m sure you know as well as I do that many people use this name casually, they take it in vain, or maybe they use it just as a bad habit. There are some who actively dismiss the power of our Lord’s name, but there are many more who just ignore it. Our world has pushed this name to the sidelines, decided that it isn’t needed, or isn’t wanted. There are other names, other philosophies, other things that seem so much more relevant, so much more useful.

But my friends, never forget the power of this name: Jesus – God saves. In his name, his followers healed the lame, the sick, and even raised the dead. In his name sins are forgiven. And Peter tells us clearly “Nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.” Just look through the pages of the New Testament, and time after time you will see the disciples of our Lord invoke his name to heal and to save. Whether we realize it or not, we are in the midst of a spiritual battle, and evil spirits fear this name, because it is the name of the Holy One himself. They recoil at his name, because they know that even speaking his name is the announcement of their defeat. It was true then, and it’s just as true now. The powers of hell tremble, because they can never overcome him. Jesus – God saves!

The name the angel gave to Mary and Joseph for this child proclaims that God is with us, in our world, and in our very lives. To speak the name of Jesus is to invite him, to welcome him, to receive him. To hold and to speak his name with love is to proclaim the good news that he has saved me and he has saved you. This is the source of our hope, that in Jesus, who was born for us, who died on the cross for us, and rose from the dead, salvation is ours for the taking. And brothers and sisters, that saving work of God is happening all the time, all around us, whenever his name is spoken or cherished in our hearts. When I whisper his name in prayer, God saves. When I meditate on his Word, his Sacred Scripture, God saves. Whenever the Eucharist is celebrated and adored, God saves. When I come to a moment of repentance, and my sins are forgiven in the name of the Lord, God saves. When I reach out in compassion or forgiveness to

another for love of him, God saves. When I endure sadness and suffering and maybe ridicule, joining it to his, God saves. When I give witness to him by my acts, just by my ordinary way of life, God saves. And when I speak his name openly, quietly or boldly, God saves. Speaking the Holy Name of Jesus is its own prayer, a profession of faith in God who saves us, an affirmation of his love, and our love given back to him.

I'm sure you know that we have just begun a Jubilee, a Holy Year of grace throughout the universal Church. And the theme that Pope Francis has given to us for this Holy Year is inspired: "Pilgrims of Hope." We are called to be pilgrims of hope. But what is a pilgrimage? It's a sacred journey, a journey that reminds us we are all on the way to heaven, towards our home with God himself. And we embark on a pilgrimage because we have hope in the God who loves us, who keeps his promises, and who alone can save us. We are all on a pilgrimage right now, a pilgrimage to this magnificent gathering, but also a pilgrimage through the course of our lives. We journey on with hope, because we know God is with us, and we know that he draws us to himself out of his eternal, unfailing love. No matter what questions we have, what obstacles we face, whatever wounds or sins have weighed us down, we know that we can hope, because God is faithful, God saves. In fact, I think I can speak for all of my brother bishops and priests when I tell you that this event itself is a huge sign of hope. You are all here, we are here, because we have heard the voice of the One who loves us. Our hope is in him, in his name alone, in the name of Jesus. God saves!

Brothers and sisters, soon our pilgrimage will take us back to our homes and our families, back to our campuses, our parishes, our places of work, and our friends. We will be pilgrims who continue a sacred journey in the company of our Lord himself. And the name of Jesus on our lips and in our hearts will be our testimony that God has saved us, that he desires to save everyone, because he is love. Do we believe that there is power in the name of Jesus? Do we reverence his name, do we trust in his saving grace? I think your presence here today gives the answer: Yes, we believe, yes, God saves. St. Paul said to the early Christians, and he says to us: "Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Give thanks to God the Father through him." God saves, Amen.