

The Name of God Revealed

It would be hard to overestimate the beauty of what God revealed to Moses at the burning of the bush. In this touching scene, God reveals to Moses his name, but not only his name. God reveals to Moses his very identity. In the course of the conversation, Moses asks God a daring and even reckless questions. Moses says the following to God: “But when I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ if they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?” The theology of naming and the power of names has a rich history throughout the Scriptures.

All of us understand that when we know someone’s name, we enter into a deeper relationship with that person. There is no need to find out a person’s name if we do not want to have some kind of connection with the person. When we talk to strangers, there is no need to reveal to them our name because we know that our interaction with them is limited. The short time together will end and we will part ways from each other. When Moses asked God for his name, he is asking to enter into a permanent relationship with God. The remarkable outcome of this conversation is that God acquiesced to Moses’ request. God revealed his own sacred name – and thus – his identity to Moses and to the Hebrew people.

We may note that powerful symbolism of names throughout Sacred Scriptures. In the Book of Genesis, we see that Adam gave names to all the animals. This showed that Adam had dominion over all these creatures. He was master and lord of all the things of the earth. Knowing a name gives us power.

A name also expresses identity. It is often the case that God will change the name of a person in order to reveal a new identity. God changed people’s names in the Old Testament to give them a new identity. This is the reason why we give a child their official name during the rite of baptism. Jesus continued this tradition by changing the names of several of his apostles.

On the mountain when God reveals his name to Moses, he enters an adventure of self-revelation. God makes himself subject to the needs of humanity. He even gives us a sense of power over him. It is ridiculous to think that we can have any sense of “power” over God but the revelation of his name signifies just such a reality. God loves us so much that he diminishes his own authority by sharing with us his identity through the revelation of his name. The power that God gives to us through the revelation of a name culminates in the Sacred Name of Jesus. We know the personal name of God almighty. We can call out to him and seek assistance through our personal relationship with him. This is most powerfully symbolized when Joseph and Mary give Jesus his name on the occasion of his circumcision. It reveals that Jesus, who is the incarnate God is made subject to humanity in the persons of Joseph and Mary. We cannot help but marvel at the humility of God who subjects himself to the authority of mere human beings. It is for this reason that we end all our prayers in the name of “Jesus.” When we pray to the Father, we pray through the powerful name of Jesus. When we pray in the power of the name of Jesus Christ, we acknowledge God’s humility and the authority that we have received in Jesus, holy name.

May God our Father hear and answer all our prayers and needs through the name of Jesus who is Lord for ever and ever. Amen.