

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 19-20, 2010
St. Mary's Church, Richmond
Fr. Michael Renninger

It will happen later today. As I do on every Father's Day, I will call my dad this afternoon. He'll do most of the talking. He will tell me about his dog, Bridget, whom he loves more than his children! He will tell me about the repair projects in the kitchen, and what new hunting gear he bought. He will tell me how busy mom is at church.

Then, as he does every year, he'll tell his favorite Father's Day story. It's the story of the day I spoke my first word. Parents tell me what a profound experience this is – when your child speaks their first word. My dad is no exception.

It was a Sunday morning, perhaps much like this one, and mom was at church. Dad was taking care of me at home. In the days leading up to this Sunday, I had been making the "baby babble" sounds. My parents were encouraging me to speak my word first word. So that morning, Dad was talking to me as I lay in the crib (and I think he was secretly hoping that mom would get home soon so he would not have to change the diaper!) Dad was talking to me. And then, it happened.....

I looked up at my father, I opened my mouth, and said my first word. I looked at my dad, and I said, "mamma."

My dad loves to tell that story. He laughs from his belly when he tells it. Are there are, let's face it, times when we get someone's name wrong, and it is funny! Our neighbor, Mrs. Alutius had six children. And when she got angry and tried to yell at one of them, she could never remember the child's name. So she just stood there and yelled EVERY one of their names until she got to the right one – Brian, Joel, Mark, Chris, Mark, Dee....until she got it right. And the neighbor kids would just laugh. Sometimes, it's funny when you get the name wrong.

That's a fun story about family members and names. But recently I heard a very sad story about family members and names. Marcia has been caring for her elderly dad for a number of years. His wife, Marcia's mom, died about 10 years ago of cancer. Then dad started to show signs of dementia and possible Alzheimer's. You know this is painful. Marcia's dad started to forget names. At first, he forgot the names of some of his friends. Then he could not remember the names of the grandchildren. Then he forgot the names of some of his children. That is so hard to watch. But he always knew Marcia's name. Whenever you mentioned Marcia, his face would light up, and he'd say, "She's the best daughter!"

But several weeks ago, Marcia called me. She had gone to see dad, and he said to her: "I member you. You're Marcia, and you're my *wife*." The next day, he said, "You're Marcia, my *sister*." The third day, he said to his daughter, "You're Marcia, and you're

my *mother*.”. He got the name right, but the relationship wrong.

Jesus in today’s Gospel, Jesus has withdrawn to pray, and his disciples are with him. From the solitude of that prayer, Jesus emerges to ask an important question: “Who do people say that I am?” In other words, Jesus is asking, *What is my name?* Jesus understood that, if people got his name right, then that means they could get their *relationship* right with him as well. If you could call him by the right name, it showed that you understood who he is, and what role he is to play in your life. But the crowds got his *name* wrong, because they were wrong about *him*.

Jesus asked, *Who do the crowds say that I am?* Some were naming him “John the Baptist,” others named him “Elijah,” others said he was a prophet who had come back from the dead. But all of these are wrong. Jesus is *more* than simply a holy guy who has come back from the dead! He is the Son of God! They got the name wrong, and they got their relationship with him wrong, even after he had walked among them for three years.

Finally, Peter exclaims – “you are the Christ!” Which means, “You are the Messiah! The savior! You are God present on earth. You are God’s love made flesh!” You are the Christ!

Jesus recognizes that Peter got his name right!

Isn’t that great! In another version of this same story, once Peter has named Jesus as “the Christ,” Jesus declare that Peter’s faith is the rock on which the church will be built.

But...if we keep reading the Gospels, we bump into a sad reality. Yes, in today’s Gospel Peter got the name right, but if we keep reading we will see that Peter still gets the relationship wrong in many ways. He calls Jesus “the Christ,” but apparently he still does not understand what his relationship with Christ should mean. After all, toward the end of the Gospel, Peter DENIES Jesus three times. Wait a minute – if Jesus is THE CHRIST, how can you ever deny him? Like Marcia’s dad, Peter gets the name right, but there are still times when he gets the relationship wrong.

Sadly, I must confess: I make same mistake too. What do I mean? Well, I get Jesus’ name right. I preach about him all the time. Like you, I stand in church every week and I say the Creed. In that Creed, we correctly name “Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father.....” If someone walked up to you at Short Pump Town Center and said, “Who is Jesus,” I’ll bet you could get the name right – I’ll bet you could correctly that that he is the Son of God, the Messiah, the son of Mary. And you would be right. We Christians know his name.....

But, like Peter, we sometimes get the name right, but the relationship wrong.....

We call him “The Christ.” That means, he is the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord. But there are days when we are facing a problem, and we don’t take time to pray about it at all. We

think that we have to face and fix the problem all by ourselves. And in that moment, like Peter, we have gotten the name right, but the relationship wrong. If Jesus is THE CHRIST, I should be praying to him about everything, all the time.

We know his name. But then there are days when we struggle to forgive someone. And instead of turning to Christ for the strength we need to embrace the freedom of forgiving, we cling to our pain, pick the emotional scab, or stir up our anger. Sure, he is THE CHRIST, but I don't turn to him and ask him to help me forgive. I get his name right, but the relationship wrong.

We know his name. He is Christ the Lord. But then there are days when we spend most of our energy pursuing worldly achievements, or monetary success, or some kind of award or recognition. Instead of ending my day by asking Christ if I served HIM well that day, I instead ask myself, "did I get ahead today, and how can I get ahead tomorrow?" I get the name right, but the relationship wrong.

We know his name. He is the Christ. That means we should place him first on our list of priorities. But then many of us spend hours on the computer, looking at web pages we would never show our grandmothers, or watching TV shows that we hope our grandchildren never catch us watching.... We've put some other passion ahead of our passion for the Christ. We get the name right, but the relationship wrong.

We know his name. He is the Christ. He promises to *be with us always*. But the we give in to despair, we face illness, we struggle with difficulty at work or home – and we get so focused on our problem, and we end up not paying attention to His presence. We get the name right, but the relationship wrong....

We know his name – He is the Christ – which means that he brings God's wisdom and word to us. So, when I face a tough moral choice, why do I then turn to Doctor Phil, or the ladies on *The View*, or turn to Judge Judy, or – worse of all – turn to my own selfishness and self-interest– in order to make my tough decision. He is THE CHRIST. I should be turning to him first for guidance. Instead, I'm listening to my own selfishness. I get the name right, but the relationship wrong.

You know who Jesus is. You get the name right. But does your **living** match your **naming**?

In this Eucharist, let us pray that we will come to know Christ more fully, and love Christ more deeply, and live Christ more completely.

May the Lord be praised now and forever. Amen.