

TODAY WE CELEBRATE THE MOST HOLY NAME OF MARY

Years ago there was a radio program called, "What's in a name?" The various hosts would take their own name and go back through the centuries and give rich thickness to the name remembering heroes who had that name, as well as villains. None of us chose the name that was given us at birth -- it was assigned by our parents, for better or worse. Then as monks we were given a new name, for in taking vows each of us promised to become a new person -- newly named. More recently in our monastic history, abbots have given us a role in this choosing of a saint's name to model the person we wished to become. While at birth I was named Paul after my father, monastically I rechose the name Paul after St. Paul -- as well as after Paul the first Christian hermit.

The positive or negative power of a particular name depends greatly on the associations that our personal experiences give to that name. For example, for a long time I had negative feelings whenever I met anyone named "Robert," because this was the name of the bully who in my childhood took every occasion to hurt me, and so it was my relationship with our own Fr. Robert that was able to redeem that name for me. So it is that many persons need to have the name "God" redeemed for them. Due to their personal experiences, the name "God" evokes a harsh, demanding, punishing, or indifferent bully. This is why the name of Jesus is so crucial -- that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every living creature confess that Jesus is Lord." Jesus is God. And so because God bears the name of Jesus, we know that nothing can separate us from the God whose heart is Love.

In addition to this enriching of the name of God by the name of Jesus, the holy name of Mary has a crucial role. Just as in the Ascension God takes the name of Jesus as his own; so it is that in the Assumption God also takes the name of Mary as his own. And what are the qualities with which Mary's names enrich the name of God? Mother, queen, companion, partner, daughter, sister, espoused, handmaiden, the new Eve, root, gate, intercessor, immaculate -- the splendor of beauty.

And so at Lauds each morning, by evoking the name of Mary, a name that interestingly means "rebellion," by evoking it we enrich the very name of God "as the one who casts the mighty from their thrones, lifts up the lowly, and fills the hungry with good things." It is especially with the name of Mary that God is known as the One who promises mercy.

Even more, Mary enriched the name of God by living the beatitudes that her son taught. And so it is that each of us enriches or contaminates the name "God" in the eyes of others by how we who bear the name Christian are living our lives.