

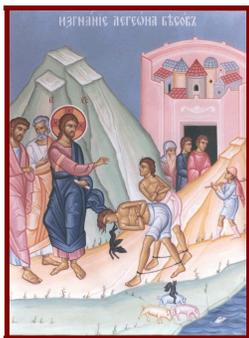
WHAT IS IN A NAME?
MEDITATIONS ON ST. LUKE 8:26-39
(Gospel for the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost, 1 November 2015)

By Subdeacon Dr. Joshua D. Genig

In the NAME of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What is in a name? That's a question we don't often ponder in today's world. And if you don't believe me, just look at all the strange names that are given to children today. But, really, what is in a name?

There was a belief in the ancient world, the world just before and during the time of Jesus, that believed that names were not merely titles, but a name was, as the ancients believed, a part of the human person. In fact the ancients believed that a man was composed of body, soul, and name. The name was a *very part of a man*. But given all of the strange names that are so common today, you know as well as I do that we have lost that sense of name. Even within Holy Orthodoxy, there are some who, sadly, have seen the naming of a child as nothing more than an old way of "doing church."



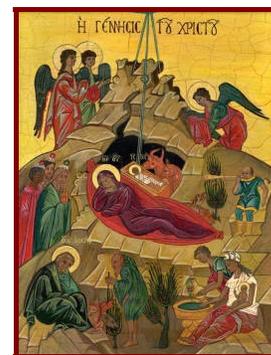
But there was a time when names meant something, and that is why Jesus asks the question that he does in today's Gospel. He comes to the man possessed by demons and he asks him: "What is your name?" You notice he doesn't ask him "What are you doing here?" or "Where have you come from?" or "What do you plan to do to me?" No, he asks him very simply: "What is your name?"

Yet, even more remarkable than the question, is the answer given. "What is your name?" asks Jesus, and to his question the man answers: "Legion." Not Joseph or John or Lawrence or Samuel or David, but 'Legion.' And his name was Legion, as he so freely admits, because he was filled with many demons.

But that is, as you know, the way the devil works. He works by power and by force and by numbers. His goal is *not* to invite you and embrace you and free you, but his goal is to overpower you. His goal is to force you to do what you wish not to do and to go where you wish not to go. His goal is that by outnumbering you, you might finally succumb to his power. That is the way of Satan, and that is the way of his demons, and that is the way of those who follow him today. All of the great sins committed in today's world are sins of force and power and being overcome.

But that is not the way of Jesus, Who comes to us, not in abstraction, but Who comes to us *with a Name*, as you know so well from the Christmas story. And as you know from that story, His name is not about force or power or strength, but His name is about weakness and gentleness and coming near to you.

The name *Jesus*, as you remember, is the name that means '*the Lord saves*.' But He does not save you by force, and He does not demand that you follow, but instead he offers and embraces and frees you, so that you might joyfully and cheerfully live the life that He has called you to live. And all of that He does, not from on high, and not with a loud voice, and certainly not with a clenched fist. But all of that He does by coming near to us. His way, you see, is simplicity. His way is that He makes himself small for us. As the Fathers have said: the Word abbreviated Himself for us. And He comes to us this way so that you and I can understand him, and welcome Him, so that you and I can be loved by Him, and in the end so that we can love Him in return. Yes, He comes to us as a little child with a name, Who wishes nothing more than for you to take Him in your arms and to make Him your own.



And that is a good reminder for all of us as the seasons change, the clocks fall back, the cold weather moves in, darkness approaches earlier in the night, and you and I begin to prepare for the Nativity fast. Soon Christmas will be upon us, and soon we will be preparing again to welcome Him Who comes in our flesh, as *one* of us to save *all* of us. Soon we will be preparing again to welcome the One named *Jesus*, Whose Name is more than merely a title, but Whose Name is at the very heart and center of Who He is and what He does.

He is a God that is for us and not against us; He is a God Who comes to us as an innocent child; and He is a God Who comes to set us free and to give life to us. And *through* us, who now bear His name – through us, who have been Baptized and Chrismated and Communed and Absolved – through us, Christians (little Christs!), who bear, in our bodies, His name and His person — through us, He comes to save the entire world.

What is in a name? Everything! And, for that, we have reason to be extraordinarily grateful!

In the NAME of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

