

Theme for 2006

Hallowed be thy name!

The following are my reflections on the theme, written late in November and December of 2005. Each presenter at Franciscan Retreats brings her and his own insights to these conferences. Fr. Ken Bartsch, OFM Conv.

Several years ago, my own thinking about our themes and conferences changed when I read an article entitled, Religious Life and the Eclipse of Love of God. The author, Edward Vacek SJ, observed how the meaning of the phrase *The Love of God* has changed. If, in the early part of the 20th century, people talking about the love of God spoke of the Christian's love for God, they now speak of *God's love for me*.

Perhaps we were so damaged by the violence of our society in the 20th century we needed to hear that reassuring message. To name only one social ill, alcoholism has wreaked havoc in our homes, schools, and churches; and defenseless children suffered grievously. Recovering victims must take care of themselves; and they need to hear their caregivers say in a thousand different ways, "I love you. I care about you. You are mine. I will never forget you. I will never leave you."

For many wounded souls, the duty to love God seemed like an unbearable burden, more than anyone could bear, especially when they had profound, traumatic fears of this apparently implacable Authority Figure. We need to know the Love of God deep in our bones as healing reassurance before we can even think of loving God in return.

Perhaps, too, the shift from a manufacturing to a consumer society shaped our notions of God. An economy built on marketing encourages poor self-image. Advertisers must continually tell us that we are not content -- and should not be content -- until we purchase their products. They must arouse our fears of being unacceptable and unloved for the ordinary human beings that we are. We should think that buying something, anything, will deliver us from those nameless horrors. Like victims, consumers see themselves with *pathos*, as needy and unsatisfied.

Faced with this continual insult from television, newspapers, billboards, etc consumers have little patience with a God who wants more. Rather than working for God, they expect God to work for them. Did Jesus not say *I have come not to be served but to serve*? Is not God the Father the provider who cares for us with unconditional love?

But at some point Christians, regaining their strength and confidence under the ministrations of God, stop being victims and consumers and start taking responsibility for the reciprocal relationship they should enjoy with God. We thank God for his saving, healing and providential graces; and we love God for God's sake -- because God is so beautiful, holy, merciful, just, and utterly deserving of our love.

Impressed by Father Vacek's article, I began to think how our retreatants needed to hear this message. It blossomed with our theme of 2005, *It's about God*, and the four conferences: *It's not about me*; *It's about Liturgy*; *It's about Jesus*; and *It's about Surrender*.

As we enter 2006, I am convinced we must *Keep our eyes fixed on him*, (Hebrews 12:2). Saint Clare urges us to *Gaze upon him*; and Saint Francis says, "*Look at the humility of Christ.*" Franciscan Retreats should not announce a self-centered, consumer-oriented religion that wants only comfort and reassurance. We must announce a Gospel that invites us to live by dying to self; and by losing ourselves, to find ourselves in the rapturous love of God.

With these thoughts in mind our team of lay women, a married couple, musicians and friars, after praying to the Holy Spirit for guidance, announces our theme for 2006: *Hallowed be thy name!* Our four conferences are titled, *The Call to Holiness; the Challenge of Holiness; Wholeness and Holiness; and Happiness and Holiness.*

Catholics know God's holiness. We sing at every Mass, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of his glory!" We stand in astonishment like Isaiah in the temple (Isaiah 6) as angels fly over head, the temple fills with incense, and the floor trembles beneath us. We tremble too, when we hear God speak to us, "*Since I, the Lord, brought you up from the land of Egypt that I might be your God, you shall be holy, because I am holy.*" (Leviticus 11:45)

For all our misgivings, however, holiness is beautiful. We're fascinated by it. We want to be drawn into the vortex of God's love though it roars like a hurricane before us. The following are the director's early reflections on the four conferences:

The call to holiness

The Book of Genesis tells us when God called Abram and Sarai He renamed them *Abraham* and *Sarah*. The *ah* sound echoed God's own name, *Yahweh*. Thus did God claim this couple as his own, to bear his holiness.

God gives each of us a *name* and calls us by that name. This name is not something that is immediately known or pronounced. Rather, its an identity by which God knows me and by which God reveals me to myself. Until I hear God calling me by name, I have no idea who I am. Nor can I comprehend my capabilities, beauty, or worth.

If this sounds odd recall how we name one another. Most of us have nicknames used by our close friends and family. These nicknames are often rich with meaning. Some people don't name their pets until they know the animals well. Some Native Americans acquire new names as they grow.

God's name for you is your true name. He renamed Jacob *Israel*, *because you have contended with divine and human beings and have prevailed.* The Angel Gabriel called Mary by a new name, *Full of Grace*; and Jesus renamed Simon, *Peter*, *because I will build my house on this rock.*

By what name does God call you? The word would identify one whom God loves, honors and protects in whatever situation or stage of life you find yourself.

Hearing my name is discovering how God has blessed me, called me holy, and claimed me for himself. But God does not give me this name to fill me with vanity. If I thought I should be exempt from suffering I will soon learn humility until I must call on the Mercy of God.

Finally, discovering my own holy name, I must give glory to the Name of Jesus, who has taught me to say to His Father, "Hallowed be thy name." With these words, the Christian says, in effect, it's not about me. I pursue holiness as I forget myself and hallow God's name.

The challenge of holiness God has said to us, “You shall be holy because I am holy.” This verse is found in Leviticus (11:45), a book of the Law known as the Holiness Code. The Law of God tells me how I *should* live, and my first response should be gratitude, for we human beings have a very hard time figuring out what is good. Left to our own devices we readily tell others how they should live, but we’re not so willing to live by the same principles and laws. We need a God who will show us what is good and what is evil, and teach us to *fear* his authority.

The fear of God which is a fear of good, is quite different from the fear of evil. No one needs to be taught to fear evil. We must study and practice the fear of good; that is reverence, awe, appreciation, gratitude, and an eager willingness to submit to holy authority. Considering the fear of the Lord, we should remember the most terrifying thing God has done for us – He died for us.

Wholeness and holiness

Wholeness implies integrity. The mature person resolves (or integrates) inner conflicts. She is no longer ashamed of herself. He no longer fears his desires. All the disparate parts of myself have come together in peaceful obedience to God. If I do not know myself entirely, I know that God does; and I see myself with the affection and compassion of God.

Wholeness accepts my life without regret or remorse, confident that God understands, forgives, and respects me. *Every saint has a past; every sinner, a future.*

We find wholeness in relationship with God and with one another. Adam is not fully formed as a man until God gives him the woman to be his partner. Discovering his desire for her and simultaneously discovering that she exists entirely apart from himself – that he can neither control nor consume her – Adam will discover his wholeness. Holiness describes the *whole* relationship of a person to God. Holiness is a fever for God, a desire for the unattainable, an inconsolable grief like that of Saint Francis who often cried, “Love is not loved; love is not loved.” If *Our hearts are restless until they rest in God*, as Saint Augustine said, they also abide peacefully with that restlessness. Holiness is a joy in being part of the whole human race, and the assurance that I am no better than any human being.

Happiness and holiness The gospels of Luke and John give ample witness to the happiness of our vocation. But our joy in this world must be in the journey, rather than the fulfillment of the journey. It is always partial, never complete. It is a partial satisfaction with confidence in the end.

Our joy will be complete when the Lord's Prayer is fulfilled: *hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*

I should have no fear about the Day of Judgment because salvation is not about me or my satisfaction! It's about God. God's glory will be my delight, my unselfconscious joy, and my ecstasy.

Hallowed be thy name
is about God. We look forward to announcing and celebrating this good news in the Year of Our Lord 2006.