

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA Second Commandment: Reverence for God's Name

"You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name." (Exodus 20:7)

Insight

Why are names important?

Sharon saw the playground commotion out of the corner of her eye. Having taught in primary schools for ten years, she was pretty good at seeing around corners and behind herself.

It looked like a group of boys from her third-grade class were involved. As Sharon moved closer to the cluster of students, she noticed that six boys were surrounding a seventh. Once she turned her attention to them, she realized—her ears being as sharply trained as her eyes—that the boys were taunting Stefan. They were using his own name to mock him.

Sharon moved quickly to break it up, "Stop it, right now!" Stefan looked relieved as the others moved away from him. Sharon knew that it didn't matter if Stefan's own actions had led to the incident. It was harmful to everybody, regardless of who started it. As a Catholic grade school, they were highlighting—for the whole year—the importance of respect for one another. Name-calling was not something that the school could tolerate.

For Reflection . . .

At baptism we are sanctified through the Trinitarian name of God, and our given name is declared.

Who are you named for and why?

Do you have a nickname by which family members refer to you with affection, and if so, how did it come about?

Additional Background

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2142–2167

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: pages 353–357

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 447–449

Church Teaching

The God Who Is

In the Old Testament, God reveals his name to Moses (see Exodus 3:14). This Revelation becomes the basis for the scriptural use of YHWH, which appears over 6,000 times in the Old Testament. It is an unpronounceable set of consonants because ancient Israel did not want to have even the possibility of abusing God's name. They would therefore, in place of pronouncing the name itself, use a title such as *Adonai*, which means "Lord."

Respect and Reverence

God's name is holy and deserves our utmost respect. The Second Commandment forbids the misuse of the holy name. When Christian believers speak that name, we follow upon the practice of our forebears in faith, so that whether we say "God," "Lord," "Father," "Jesus Christ," or "Holy Spirit," we utter the name with reverence to bless, praise, and glorify. When we speak the name of God in hatred, defiance, or accusation, we engage in grave sin.

Misuse of God's Name

Blasphemy is the term to describe the wrongful use of God's name. It includes the Virgin Mary and the Saints. In addition, this Commandment prohibits taking the Lord's name in vain, that is, taking a false oath or using God's name to witness a perjury. Jesus warns not to swear upon God's name, speaking simply and plainly to convey what we mean (see Matthew 5:33–34). Finally, the name of God must not be used to justify immoral actions, such as terrorism, war, or any kind of abuse.