**Sunday before the Nativity**

Today’s lesson from the Gospel is the beginning of the New Testament. It gives us a long list of Hebrew names that compose the family tree of Jesus Christ on the human side. As we read these names, we review some two thousand years of the human history. And we learn that the history of mankind is composed of the lives of different persons.”

“Some boy undertook to read the Bible to a blind man each day. As he began reading the first chapter of Matthew which contains a list of names in the genealogy of Jesus, the boy said, “Let’s skip all those names, sir.” The blind old man said, “No, please keep reading”. The boy read with effort through all those “begats” of Matthew. Then he noted tears on the blind man’s cheeks. “What is so emotional about a list of names?” the boy asked. The blind man replied, “God know everyone of those fellows, and He knew them by name. That makes me feel important to know that God knows me and He knows my name.””

“God knows us by name and calls us by name. When Adam, seized with remorse and fear, was hiding from God, in the darkest thickets of the Garden of Eden, he heard God’s voice calling Him by name, “Adam, where are you?” (Gen. 3, 9). Indeed it is a personal call of God to each one of us that creates the person and crowns him with glory and honor. The Prophet Isaiah said, *“The Lord called me from the womb, from the matrix of my mother He mentioned me by name”* (Is. 49, 1). The uniqueness of each person is symbolized by his or her name. In another chapter of the Scripture God says to Moses, *“I know you by name”* (Ex. 33, 17). This is a great personalism of the Bible: God knows my name, I matter to Him because He loves me and cares for me!”

“So, the Gospel of Matthew that we heard today begins with a long list of names. At the end of the list we find the name above every name, the name of Jesus. The procession of the human kind passes through the centuries and comes to rest in Bethlehem. *“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”*(Mt. 1, 20-21). The whole story of the Nativity is wrapped up in that one name: Jesus, the name which means literally “God saves” or “God is salvation”.”

“God knows my name and in His grace He granted me to know His name that I may call upon Him freely and enter into His presence boldly. “Jesus” is the name of my God! “Jesus” is the name of my Savior! “Jesus” is the name by which demons are cast out. “Jesus” is the name that enables God’s power in me! “Jesus” is the name that beats in my heart and on my lips, so I keep praying, “Lord Jesus, the Son of God, have mercy on me!” “Jesus” is the name that forgives and cleanses me! “Jesus” is the name that opens the gates of heaven!”

“Dear brothers and sisters! Jesus calls us by many names. He calls us servants, followers, disciples, co-workers. He calls us friends, His holy nation. He calls us children, living stones of a new temple, temples of His Holy Spirit. All of these names are important. They bestow upon us God’s honor and love, but none of them is so important as our own personal name, the name we received at the holy Baptism. God called us by name, he knew us before we were born. He made us and formed us in the womb of the mother. He called us into existence. He loves us with His everlasting love. He wants us to be with Him forever. He came to be born at Christmas not just in Bethlehem but in our own hearts.”

“Dear brothers and sisters! The Lord Jesus is asking everyone of us: “Will you receive Me? Behold, I have been standing, calling and knocking at the door of your soul all these years. I come to release you from sin and death, to set you free, to bring you God’s love and power, to help you achieve your fullest potential as My child. This is Jesus calling you! Do you hear Me?