

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael Basque

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What is a name? A name is something which can connect one person to another, such as when a child is named after a favourite relative or friend. It can also distinguish an individual from the rest of a family or group. Since names help establish the identity of a person or community, they can refer to particular qualities associated with that individual or group. A name can be seen as a sign of respect or derision. Clearly, names can send a lot of different messages.

In today's First Reading, Luke records it was at Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians". During Christ's lifetime, the Jewish community was divided into a number of factions with distinct identities. The Pharisees were primarily a lay movement which stressed the importance of observing the Jewish Law and the oral traditions which had grown up around it. The Sadducees were members of the Priestly class in Jerusalem who emphasised the importance of proper ritual sacrifice in the Temple. The Zealots were political revolutionaries who sought to drive the pagan Romans out of Israel and establish a Jewish religious state. The Essenes lived out in the desert and awaited the coming of God's Kingdom at the end times. Since the early Church was composed mostly of Jews, many of its members and outsiders considered it another faction within Judaism. However, as Jesus indicates in the Gospel, the unwillingness of many Jews to recognize the works he did in his Father's name means they do not belong to his flock. They differed from his disciples who heard his voice and followed him. As the number of non-Jewish members of the Church grew, the gap between Christ's followers and other Jews increased. This separation was intensified by the persecutions undertaken by certain Jewish leaders. When at Antioch the disciples were called "Christians", it formally recognized their common identity and how it differed from the rest of Judaism.

During this Covid-19 pandemic, Catholics and other people of faith have the chance to reflect upon the meaning of names. The word "catholic" means universal. Those who incorporate this idea into their identity should be able to see beyond the here and now and recognize the bigger picture. Their timeframe is not measured in years or decades but eternity. Their area of concern is not just family or country but all of humanity. The word "Christian" means follower of Christ. Those who incorporate this idea into their identity should be willing to give their life for others without conditions. These qualities are needed in our world at this time. In anxious times there exists the temptation to rush to judgment or demand an immediate answer. The patience which comes from taking the longer view is not always appreciated; but necessary. As social tensions increase, other people become competitors. The ability to see them as part of our human family is not always desired, but true. In responding to a serious threat to one's well being, protection is justified at all costs. The willingness to make sacrifices without knowing the final outcome is not considered wise but is courageous.

A name establishes one's identity. An identity is about more than one's family origins, appearance or nationality. It defines the character of the individual. During this Covid-19 pandemic, Catholics, other Christians and all people of faith have the opportunity to show how their religious beliefs distinguish how they understand and respond to this crisis from those of others.