

FRANCISCAN MISSIONARY UNION
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Dear Friend of the Missions,

Happy New Year! I hope that everyone is still having a wonderful Christmas celebration. Let us all start the new year by praying for peace. January 3 is the Solemnity of the Epiphany and Jan 10 is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Martin Luther King Day is Jan 18 and Jan 22 is a day of penance and prayer for life. Jan 23 is the feast of Blessed Marianne of Moloka'I. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is January 18-25. Please join in some of the gatherings during the week to pray for Church Unity. Thank you for your support for our missions. All of our missionaries pray that this New Year will be peaceful and healthy for you and your loved ones.

What's in a Name?

Russell Becker, O.F.M.

After Vatican II and the renewal of Biblical studies, many translations decided to use the name *Yahweh* to refer to God in the biblical texts where the word appeared, so that readers would understand the text was using the name God revealed to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3,14). In the Hebrew Bible, the word never had any vowels with it just the consonants: YHWH. When it was read the word *adonai* was said. This word means Lord in English. Scholars guessed at the vocalization of the word. Bible translations, songs, preachers etc. used the word quite frequently. Many Jewish scholars found the saying of the word that they never speak to be insensitive. The Church asked, in deference to our Jewish brothers and sisters, that we Catholics join them and no longer speak the word YHWH either. Some people groused, some people thought it was not important, but inter-religious dialogue works best when everyone honors each other's legitimate sensitivities and each of us can come to a better appreciation of each other's faith, and our own..

When Moses met the Lord in the burning bush and was told to go to the Pharaoh, Moses did not want to go. He wanted to know who was speaking to him from the bush: the voice identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses knew that it would not be enough, the people wanted God's name so that they could call upon God when they needed him. The voice spoke. What most of us recognize is the translation of the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible: *I am who am*. Then the voice said tell them *I AM* has sent you. Scholars have been trying since then to try to discern what all this meant.

For the people of Israel knowing God's name was important. They could use God's name to bless and curse, to ask for help. It was a bit of security for them. God's name told them something about God and gave them a way to call upon God. That is why Moses wanted to know the name. He did not think that without the name the people would follow him, nor would the Pharaoh let the people go free. In later times, when they had the opportunity to reflect on the experience of the Exodus, they appreciated the awesomeness of the name of the One who saved them and gave them the Promised Land. It was a name they did not speak, but a name that they often used in creating names for their children. So when you come across biblical names that begin with "Je" or end with "yah" are words that include the name of God. *Jehoshua* (Joshua) means *the Lord is salvation*. The Greek for *Jehoshua* is *Jesus* which also means *the Lord is salvation*. But what did YHWH really mean?

Some possibilities. One thing that can probably be said without any trouble is that for the Hebrew Bible *I am who am* does not convey the meaning to the satisfaction of the people. The Greek version translated it in a way that appealed to people who spoke and thought in Greek language patterns. The Israelites were not concerned with God being, (that was the Greek question). They knew God existed, everything around them testified to that. Their anxiety was about what God had done, is doing and would do. Some scholars have thought that the expression has to do with causality so they suggest: *I cause to be*. This is a fine idea since it identifies God with creation of the world and his special people Israel. Others have suggested that it is a statement of nearness as in *I will be there*. That understanding of God gives confidence in the difficult times especially. One scholar put it this way: *I shall be there as who I am shall I be there*. In the end, I think the answer God gave was no answer to the question of his name. God did not want to be at the beck and call of the people. More than anything else God wants faith and trust that God is faithful, and that God is near.

So then, basically, the more Moses asked for a name the less information was given. Moses was sent to the people to get them to take a chance on the God. When people ask who God is, give us a name, reveal yourself to us, the answer is: you have to believe, you have to have trust. In other words: *don't worry I'll be there!* Moses asked what will I

tell the people and Pharaoh, and God replied: ***don't worry, I'll be there!*** The people asked who will set us free and the response is: ***don't worry I'll be there!*** When they got out to the desert and were hungry and thirsty and wondered who would feed them: ***don't worry, I'll be there!*** When they got to the edge of the Promised Land that was already inhabited and wondered how they would be able to take it: ***don't worry, I'll be there!*** Of course the people did worry and turned to other gods. The golden calf was just one of a long line of failures on the part of Israel to trust in the God who always promises to be there.

With the benefit of hindsight, we are able to read the Bible and recognize how God was always there. If the whole Old Testament was not enough, certainly Jesus and all that he did for us should be enough for us to trust and believe in God's nearness and ever-present help in distress and in peace: ***don't worry, I will be there!*** in Jesus becomes ***I am with you always!***

Our Vocation. First of all, it is to trust and believe. When we face difficulties and things seem hopeless we are supposed to take the chance and believe. We call for help and we hear ***don't worry I will be there-I am with you always!*** It still takes as much courage for each of us as it was for Moses and the Israelites, and there are many more false gods to which we can turn. All of us have probably failed to trust, but we can look back and recognize how faithful God has been. For many of us though, all that hindsight does not make it much easier to trust in God's faithfulness. But we stand before the future and we look for some help, some guidance and the words ring in our hearts: ***don't worry, I 'll be there-I am with you always!*** That is one part of our vocation. God is near and faithful. God helps us. We are fortunate, indeed.

The other side of this vocation is to be part of God's answer to others who are searching, to let them know: ***don't worry, I'll be there-I am with you always!*** Every answer to our prayers is a mission to be ways that God can speak to others and they will know that God is near. Each of us will have numerous and diverse ways to do that. Sometimes we may lose heart and not have the ability to trust and be there for others. That is when we will hear again what God has spoken for all the ages: ***don't worry, I'll be there-I am with you always!*** Then we may have the courage to act and we know and help others to know that God is near, always there. Every act of love, forgiveness, compassion, justice, friendship is witness to that nearness. We are the way God is there in our families, our communities, our churches, in our countries, in our world.

A long time ago Moses worried and asked for a name to call upon, he got no name but a promise: ***don't worry, I'll be there!*** When we worry, and we call upon the name of Jesus, we get an even better promise: ***don't worry, I'll be there-I am with you always!*** Trust in that promise forever.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you have the courage to let go and trust in God's faithfulness?

2. How have you experienced God's nearness?

3. Think of some people who have helped you to know God is there. Give thanks for them.

4. Get involved in Bible Study this year. Check out the Sunday reflections on the website: www.fmunion.org. It will make a big difference.

Please pray for our missionaries who celebrate their birthdays this month:

January 21: Bishop Capistran Heim, O.F.M. (Brazil)
January 24: Fr. Pius Liu, O.F.M. (Taiwan)
January 26: Fr. David Babcock, O.F.M. (Brazil)
January 30: Br. Henry Fulmer, O.F.M. (Home Missions.)
January 31: Fr. Paul Osborne, O.F.M. (Brazil)

May God bless them with health and energy and peace!

Please remember our present and former missionaries who are ill:

Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)
Fr. Ignatius McGeedy, O.F.M. (Brazil)
Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Home Missions)
Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)
Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)
Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)

May God grant them health, peace and happiness!

Br. Rosario Vieira, O.F.M. (Brazil) died on December 22, 2009. May he rest in peace. Amen.