

**WHAT'S IN A NAME? (MT 16:13-20)**  
Sermon given by the Rev. Corinne Hodges,  
Sunday, August 24, 2008, St. John of the Cross'  
Mass on the Grass at Bonneyville Mill Park

*The sermon was preached without notes. The following is the preacher's reflection on the gospel, done in preparation for Sunday's message.*

Recently I was talking with a parishioner when her husband called her by a name I had never heard before. I asked her about this and she explained to me that she has several names: one that her close family has called her since she was a child, another that friends from her home state use and a third name, the name I knew, which most people here in Northern Indiana know her by. My guess is that many of us have the same, several names that we use or others use for us, depending on the situation. But what is in a name? Some of us have a history behind our name, for example my middle name is Ursula, my grandmother's name, and my nephew is the fourth Charles B. Cranford in our family. But most of us were given names that were simply personal preferences of our parents. Our names are just one part of what makes up our identity.

About five years ago I was on a retreat with about ten other clergy. We were told to break up into pairs and then answer this question, "Who are you?" It's such a simple question, but think about it, when we search our souls the answer is not as easy. Who are you? Where does one start? With one's name? With what one does for a living? With the roles one plays in life? With where we were born and raised? Truly none of these questions actually say who we are.

In our Gospel reading today we hear of Peter, aka "the Rock." Peter already has several names including Simon and son of Jonah. The Rock is a name Jesus gives Peter and it is significant. Peter is to become the rock, the foundation, the spokesperson, the chief teacher of the Christian church. This name says something about his role. He is the rock because he was the first of the disciples to claim Jesus as Messiah. He was the first to profess his faith, what he believed and who he knew

Jesus Christ to be. Peter was a certainly believer in Christ, but of course, just like us, he was so much more.

Our Gospel not only explores who Peter is. The first question asked is about Jesus' identity. "Who is Jesus Christ?" We hear in the reading that Jesus also has many names: Messiah, Son of Man, Son of the living God and Prophet. Jesus turns to the disciples and asks them to answer for themselves, "Who do you say that I am?" Who is Jesus to you? If you are like me, the answer has changed throughout your life. When I was younger, Christ had the name of Teacher, teaching me lessons of right and wrong. Other times Christ was Mentor, someone for me to fashion my life after. At times he has been Savior, Liberator, helping me in desperate, seemingly hopeless situations, times when I felt discouraged and defeated. Just like us, Jesus has multiple names. But again, just like knowing ourselves, to truly know who Jesus is, we have to search. We cannot just take someone else's word for it. At some point, we have to search our own hearts, make up our own minds and answer based on our own experiences. Of course whatever we decide, we only know a fragment about who Christ is. Jesus is so much more than our words could ever say.

There is one other name that appears in our Gospel today, surprisingly it is used only a few times in the Bible. It is "church." Church is the title given to the new community of believers that Christ calls together. And church is what has brought us all here today. Now most people when they think of church picture a building with four walls. Today we gather as the church of St. John of the Cross, but we are outside in the beautiful, natural setting of Bonneyville Mill. Are we any less of a church being here than we are at 601 E. Vistula Street? No. Jesus teaches that church is much bigger than that. Church is not the building. It's not even what we do, it's who we are. Church is the people, the community, the family and friends, the believers of St. John of the Cross.

Who are you? Who is Christ to you? These are difficult questions that take a lifetime of exploration and learning. Christ has given us this compassionate and caring

church community to help us in discovering the answers. Today is a day to celebrate that. How blessed we are!