



SAINT JAMES'
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Fremont, California

SERMON

31. May, 2009. Pentecost

Title: "Mi Tocayo" . . . "My Namesake"

Text: Acts 2:1-21

J.J.



Today we celebrate Pentecost, a day that many call “the birthday of the Church.” It’s the story of how the Holy Spirit came to the disciples in “a sound like the rush of a violent wind” . . . and “appeared as tongues of fire resting on each one of them” and how they “began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” It’s an amazing 2000 year old story . . . a story that was very important for the beginning of Christianity and the formation of the early Christian Church. And, of course, we Episcopalians love such stories—we love history and tradition. But equally important, we Episcopalians love the “here and now,” and what God is doing among us in the present time. We even have a name for it—“Incarnational Theology”—Christ working in and through each one of us, “here and now.” And that’s an important focus for us on this Sunday, as we baptize four young people: Kilipo, Heaven, Melissa and Emma . . . it’s important that we see the Holy Spirit

coming to us today, in this place and at this time. That’s not to say Luke’s story in The Acts of the Apostles, as it was read to us, is unimportant—it’s very important!—but it’s also important that today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit into the lives of these four people . . . the Holy Spirit descending upon them—oh not with the sound of a violent wind, or in tongues of fire, or the speaking of different languages—no, but God coming to them in a very special way, in a mighty and powerful way, to make them God’s own children . . . members of God very own family . . . God placing God’s very own name upon them, as we baptize Kilipo, Heaven, Melissa and Emma “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” . . . God making them (and, by the way, you and me too, we who have been baptized, and we who remember and renew our baptismal promises this day) . . . God making us God’s very own namesake.

Let me tell you a story about name-giving and namesakes. This story comes out of my own experience. It took place the summer of 1985, when my family and I were on vacation in Mexico. Anticipation ran high as we drove into the little village of San Miguel de Allende. You see, some nine years earlier, we had lived in that historic village, with a Mexican family, the Guererro family. My daughter Deborah and son Paul remembered only a little of that extraordinary experience, for at the time they were only eight and four years old. Son John, remembered none of it . . . he had been only a baby . . . in fact, this is where he had learned to walk. And son Michael, well, he had never set foot in any part of Mexico until this very moment. Nine whole years had come and gone . . . and now, once again we were driving down those rough cobblestone streets of San Miguel . . . and we were excited as we were about to visit “our family,” to become re-acquainted, and especially to see again Señor Guerrero, (Señor, with a capital “S,” if you know what I mean), whose first name was Miguel (Michael).

I can not tell you the joy we had brought to Sr. Miguel Guerrero six years earlier when we announced the birth of our son and named him “Michael.” Señor was convinced we had named our son after him. Not a letter would pass without “Señor Miguel” inquiring: “Como esta “Miguelito” . . . how is my little Michael. And now, Michael, almost six years old, was traveling to Mexico for the first time, and was about to meet his namesake. As I said, anticipation ran high that day (perhaps a better word is: “anxiety”) . . . anxiety ran high that day as we made our way to “La Casa de los Guerreros.” Now, before we left on this trip, we took the time to review some Spanish words with our children; words of courtesy and survival: “por favor” . . . “gracias” . . . “estoy enfermo” (I’m sick) . . . and when introduced to a stranger to say: “con mucho gusto” (I’m pleased to meet you).

At last, turning a corner, we came to “La Casa:” Knock . . . knock . . . knock . . . and suddenly the big old cedar door flung open, and there, in all his glory, stood the Señor with his marvelous smile . . . anxiously waiting . . . wonderfully excited . . . “buenas tardes” . . . “buenas tardes” . . . “bienvenidos” . . . “bienvenidos” . . . “passé” . . . “passé” . . . “come in . . . “come in.” And there were warm hugs and “abrasos” all around. And then Señor stepped back to take a look at the children who were all lined up like the Von Trapp family. “Ah,

Deborah, so grown up . . . you are such a beautiful Señorita” . . . and he kissed her hand! “And look at you, Pablo . . . oh how tall you are” . . . and he shook his hand like a man. “And this must be Juanito . . . ah, no more a baby, but a joven (a young man)” . . . and he patted him on the head. And then, he walked over to Michael . . . looked down at him . . . and in a deep voice, said: “and who is this?” And with great pride, I said: “Señor, esto es mi hijo, Michael . . . Michael, esto es Sr. Guerrero.” And son Michael looked up at the Señor with his big blue eyes, and as if right on cue, in a loud, clear voice, said: “Con mucho gusto.” And the Señor . . . the Señor was absolutely speechless. “Miguel,” he cried, “Miguel, tu hablas español . . . you speak Spanish!” And he got down on his knees to get a better look (in all my life I’d never thought I would ever see the Señor on his knees! Never!). “Miguel” . . . “mi tocayo” . . . “mi tocayo.” And there were tears in the Señor’s eyes as he embraced Michael . . . **“mi tocayo” . . . “my namesake”**

Only later did I come to know what this was all about and what it meant. The phrase “mi tocayo” . . . “my namesake” (or “mi tocaya” in the feminine) you won’t find in a dictionary. It’s a word that describes a unique relationship between two individuals who share the same name. Now in Hispanic culture, as well as in biblical times, a name is not just some sort of identification label . . . no, it’s an expression of one’s very being: One’s name discloses one’s character . . . one’s nature. **“Mi tocayo” . . . “my namesake” . . .** is a term of endearment that describes a unique relationship between two people. It describes a oneness . . . a unity. . . a like-mindedness. That is not to say that the two individuals are the same. Indeed not! Señor Guerrero and my son Michael were, and are (thank God) very different, but there was and is a special connection between the two of them . . . a special bonding . . . a special understanding . . . it was as if my son Michael had become Señor Guerrero’s very own son that day. . . . and that is a unique relationship that will not and will not ever be broken . . . **“mi tocayo” . . . “my namesake.”**

In a way that is what today’s Baptism is all about . . . As God puts God’s very own name upon Kilipo, Heaven, Melissa and Emma . . . and makes them, and yes, you and me as well, makes us God’s very own namesake. That really is what Pentecost is all about. And today, as we, along with Kilipo, Heaven, Melissa and Emma, as we renew our vows and promises . . . as we recall that we all were/are baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” . . . let us remember and give thanks that as we ourselves have received God’s very own name, we ourselves are all members of God’s family . . . we are God’s “tocayas” y “tocayos.” And so, listen carefully, in just a few moments, and you will probably hear God saying to you: **“mi tocayo” . . . mi tocaya” . . . “my namesake”** Amen.

S.D.G.

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