

The Use of the Name of God in the Liturgy

Bulletin Announcement / Catechetical Handout

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The Name of God

Recently, the Vatican issued a statement saying that Catholics should no longer say or sing the ancient Name of God (Yahweh) during the liturgy. This unexpected statement caused many Catholics to pose the question, “Why?”

From the earliest times, the Hebrew people believed that God’s name was holy and deserved the greatest respect. They were so reverent that they refused to even say God’s name and indicated the name in writing only with the Hebrew consonants “YHWY.” Many years later as Christianity spread, they followed the same precedent and to this day “YHWY” is normally rendered in English as “Lord.”

Over the course of time, some popular and prayerful songs used in the liturgy have used the Name of God (for example, *You are near* or *Sing a new song*). The Vatican’s directive asks for this practice to cease out of respect for the Name of God. Interestingly, publishers have moved quickly to offer alternatives so that these songs may remain part of the repertoire and also respect this ancient Judeo-Christian tradition.

Is there a value in upholding such an antiquated tradition? When Bishop Arthur Sarratelli, chair of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship, contacted his brother bishops with the Vatican’s wishes, he noted that this presents us with “an opportunity to offer catechesis for the faithful as an encouragement to show reverence for the Name of God in daily life, emphasizing the power of language as an act of devotion and worship.” It also has been noted that this provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the continuous practice of offering such great reverence to the Lord’s name—a practice dating back to our first ancestors in the faith.

Words are important! Names are important! By stepping back and reflecting on this ancient Name of God, it also gives us an opportunity to reflect on how we use God’s many names. Are they holy to us? Do we treat them as precious and deserving of respect? Or do we use them as curses or expressions of surprise? Our spiritual ancestors have something to teach us: Holy is God’s Name!

If you would like to receive a Microsoft Word file with this bulletin announcement, please email your request to Theresa Mulvoy at tmulvoy@straphael.org. Check out our other downloadable resources at www.madisondiocese.org. Go to the “Liturgical Catechesis” section of the Worship pages.