



Solemnity of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, Titular Feast of the Society of Jesus



Date: Saturday, January 3, 2026 | **Season:** Christmas | **Year:** A

First Reading: Sir 51:8-12

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 8:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Gospel Acclamation: Phil 2:1-11

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:21-24 (Proper)

Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

The Holy Name of Jesus is the centre of this feast and the centre of our life. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow Jesuits, and friends of the Society, today we celebrate not an idea but a name that was chosen carefully, lived faithfully, and trusted completely.

When Ignatius of Loyola and his companions named themselves the Society of Jesus, they were making a deliberate choice. They did not take the name of a founder, a place, or a rule. In the sixteenth century, that was unusual. The name Jesus was not decoration. It was a commitment. It meant that their lives, their obedience, and their mission would be measured against the life and way of Jesus himself. This feast reminds us why that choice still matters.

Our first reading from the Book of Sirach comes from a man who has been close to danger. Ben Sira speaks plainly about fear, pressure, and enemies. He does not claim strength. He remembers what saved him:

“I called on the Lord... and he heard my voice.”

To call on the Lord’s name meant trusting God when every other support had failed. It was not brave language. It was what you said when you were afraid and could not fix things yourself. Ignatius learned that prayer the hard way. After Pamplona, confined to bed, his career over and his future uncertain, he clung to the name of Jesus as something solid, something that could hold him when nothing else could.

That prayer is still alive among us. Many people know what it is to reach the limits of their control. When things do not move and answers do not come, prayer becomes simple and direct. Sirach shows us that calling on the Lord's name is not a sign of defeat, but what people do when they refuse to give up.

Our Psalm asks a hard and honest question about our place in the world, and then answers it with quiet strength:

“O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth... you have crowned humanity with glory and honour.”

This dignity is not earned by success. It is given. For Jesuits, this belief shapes everything we do. Education, pastoral care, and social engagement only make sense if we truly believe that every human life carries weight before God. When dignity is denied, whether through poverty, neglect, or injustice, God's name is diminished.

Saint Paul's hymn in Philippians shows us why the name of Jesus carries such power. Jesus does not cling to status. He chooses obedience and service, even when it costs him everything. Because of this, Paul says,

“...God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.”

This is not reward for ambition. It is the fruit of love that gives itself away. For the Society of Jesus, this hymn became the aim of our life. Availability. Humility. Readiness to be sent. The name of Jesus is exalted because he serves.

The Gospel from Luke places this trust in an ordinary family and a simple act (Luke 2:21–24). A child is circumcised and named. Jesus enters fully into the law and the poverty of his people. His parents offer two birds, the offering of those who have little. His name, Jesus, means “the Lord saves.” Matthew makes that point explicit: he is to be named Jesus “because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The name is not symbolic. It is a mission.

The Church speaks clearly about this. The Catechism teaches that “the name ‘Jesus’ contains all: God and man and the whole economy of salvation.” (CCC 2666) To pray the name of Jesus is to invoke him and call him close. This name

is not empty sound. It carries the presence it names. It becomes our simplest prayer, repeated through the day, shaping our choices and steadyng our work. The Church has always taught that it sanctifies, saves, and stands against evil.

Ignatius discovered this slowly. At Manresa, weak and deeply unsettled, he learned through prayer and struggle to let Jesus, not his own fears or ambitions, order his desires. Peace did not come quickly, but it did come. Later Jesuits learned the same lesson. Pedro Arrupe spoke of devotion to the Heart of Jesus as the source of freedom and fruitfulness in mission. Recent popes have urged Jesuits to renew total adherence to this name, especially at the frontiers of mission where faith meets uncertainty.

This feast asks something concrete of us. To carry the name of Jesus is to act in his way. For Jesuits, it means discernment that leads to service, not comfort. It means obedience that frees us for mission. For all of us, it means choosing closeness to those who have little, like the family in the Gospel who bring only two birds.

So we end where we began, with the name itself. Not as an idea, but as the measure of how we live.

As we pray this week, these three Ignatian questions can guide us.

- Where am I being asked to rely less on my own control and more on the name of Jesus?
- Whose dignity nearby is fragile, and what simple action would honour it?
- What concrete choice this week will place me more clearly at the service of Christ and his people?

Let us kneel before this name, exalted through humility.

Jesus, save us, shape us, and send us in your service. Amen.

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2026-01jan-03-ya-ct-02/>

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.