**Known by Name in Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

The start of every new semester is packed with activities that always manage to take me by surprise, even though they happen every term. These are the days to fine-tune my syllabus, adjust to a new class schedule, study new editions of my textbooks, and start dressing up again.

There is one task, though, that seems more challenging each year – perhaps because I am only now realizing the importance of this responsibility. This undertaking is simply learning all of my students’ names.

I look at my class lists with dozens of names, and I review my seating charts where all my students have selected their seats for the semester. Most helpfully, I study the photo directory with their pictures, trying to match names and faces as quickly as I can.

In recent years, as I have done this, I have also reflected on how important it is to be known by name, and to know others by name. Yes, I may have some students who fervently hope for peaceful anonymity when I am deciding who to call on in class. Yet, for most of us, to be known by name is something we cherish.

From the time Adam named all of God’s wondrous creations, Scripture is replete with reference to the importance of names. Moses begged to know the name of God. Our ancestors in faith – Abraham, Sarah, Peter, and Paul, to name but a few -- often saw their names changed in a divine transformation when they were called to a sacred task. At other times, the name of a child – including Jesus Himself – was announced before birth. In a world that can seem deeply impersonal, we are repeatedly reassured that God knows us each by name.

At some of the most sacred times in our own lives, our names are also central. At Baptism, parents are asked, *“What name do you give this child?”* At Confirmation, we pick a patron saint in whose name we are confirmed. Those who enter religious life often take on new names as their new lives begin. Earlier this spring, the world cheered a new Pope introduced first by his Baptismal name, and then by the papal name by which he will be known for the rest of his life.

Perhaps memorizing names in a classroom is not quite as profound. Yet, I think there is something sacred about it too.

As I study those names, I am reminded that, years ago, parents gazed on each of these now-adults and, with loving care, selected the name that now appears on my roster. Perhaps these are names that honor a beloved relative, a cultural tradition, a favorite saint, or a favorite moniker that struck happy new parents as well suited to their infant.

As I study those names, I am reminded that each of my students is unique. Occasionally, I have had students with shared names, and every year there seems to be a name that is particularly popular – making the task of name-learning a bit harder. However, there never has been or will be anyone exactly like my students. All of them had a different journey to my class, and each will travel through life afterwards on a path meant only for him or her.

As I study those names, I know that each of them will have a grade from my class recorded on a transcript with that name. This reminds me of the mutual responsibilities we have to each other as we work through the semester together.

As I study those names, I hope that many of them will, in the years to come, pop up again in my email and my caller ID with news, updates, questions, wedding invitations, birth announcements and the other milestones in life. So many familiar names from classes past are a joyful part of my present. Sadly, there may also be times when I hear sad news from those who are still new names to me, and I know there will be occasions to pray for them – by name.

As I study those names, I anticipate that in a few years those names will be printed in a graduation program and written in beautiful calligraphy on a hard-earned diploma.

Until then, I hope that in the hectic, challenging years my students spend in law school, every time they are called by name, they will remember that they are part of a community that cares about each of them. I hope that it helps them to see in each other a sister or brother who they know by name as they walk together through ordinary times.

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