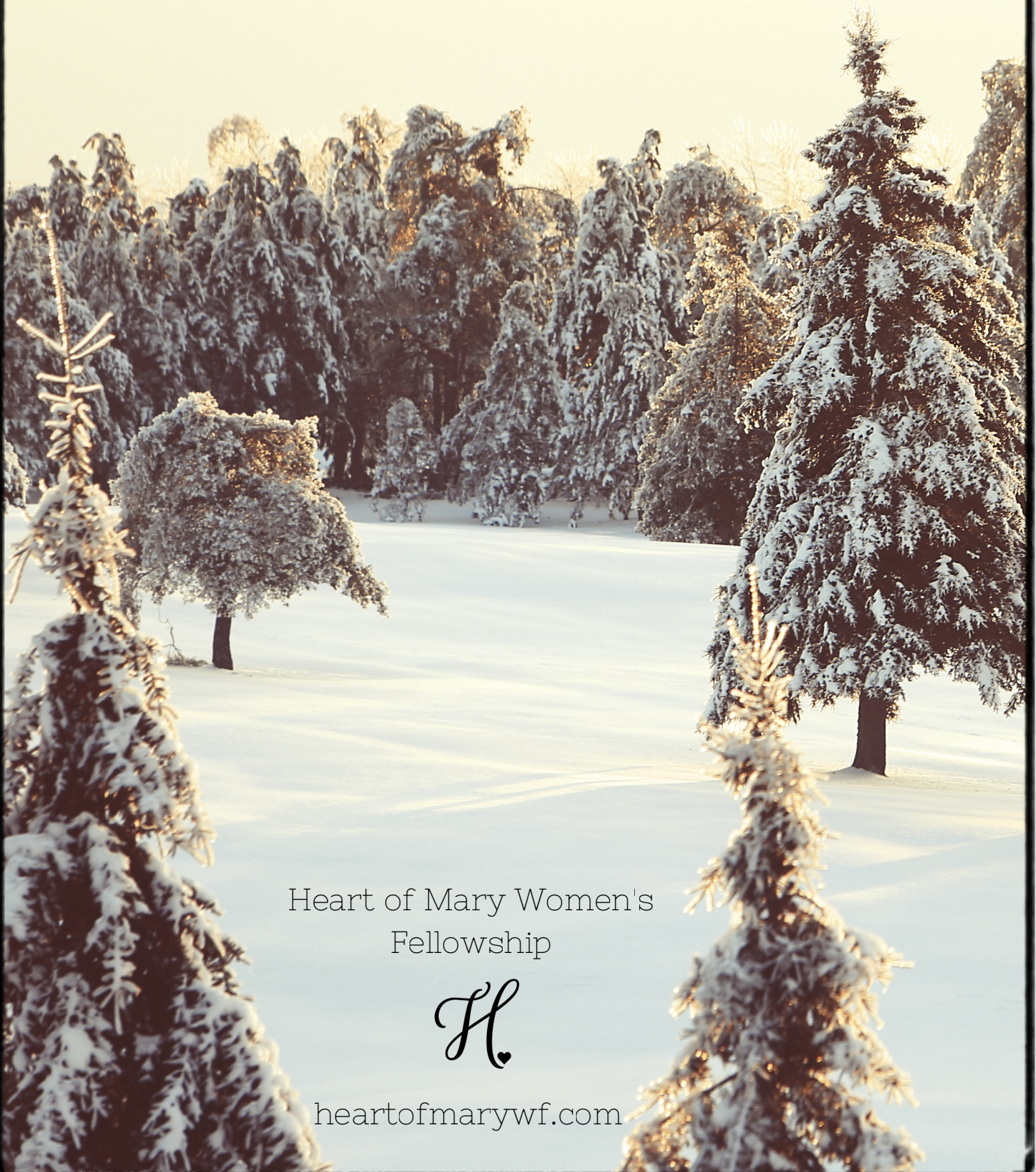


The Jesse Tree

A day by day journey through Advent



Heart of Mary Women's
Fellowship



heartofmarywf.com

About this Study

We hope that you'll dive in, grow in the Lord, and share with others what beauty God reveals to you through it. If you are doing this study independently, know that we at HOM are here for you & that you also have a LARGE community of women through our website and social media that are participating too! You are truly never alone!

If you are completing this study in a group setting - we are excited that you have found a local community to grow with, on top of our online sisterhood. Please use this study journal for your reference, resource, and more during your meetings and the personal time leading up to it.

Looking for a group? Please visit www.heartofmarywf.com/groups to find a meet up near you.

Are you already in one but not listed on our website? Looking to start one? Please contact us for more information about our "HOM Ambassador" program. We have team members available specifically to help you grow a local group and lead other women through community, prayer, and devotion. Their support is available at all times. We also want to help you grow! We will advertise your group on our website & social media! And we have free resources for you as well. Please email us at heartofmarywf@aol.com

Note: All written content has been reviewed by a Catholic spiritual director to cross check that all statements align with the teachings and tenants of the Roman Catholic Church.

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The Jesse Tree Writing Team



Mandi



Ashley



Sarah



Monique

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[1 Kings 3:5-14, 16-28](#)

Growing up, I had to make sure that EVERYTHING was even and equal if my sister and I were both given something. If she got a bigger portion, I'd make sure mine was increased. Sometimes, I'll admit, I tried to give myself the bigger portion. Fairness wasn't so high on my list when I was getting the lion's share.

Solomon, however, always had a heart for fairness. He was so wise that he KNEW how unwise he was, and asked for the wisdom to judge the Lord's people and the wisdom to distinguish between good and evil.

His concern for fairness and justness is outlined by the second part of today's reading, where the two prostitutes come to him to have him distinguish who is lying and who is telling the truth. This is one story that always stuck with me when I heard it in mass as a young kid in Catholic school. I remember being so HORRIFIED at the thought of King David suggesting they chop the baby in half! It seemed like such a

scary and terrible thing to even suggest. As a kid, that was what really stuck out to me. He wasn't serious, of course, he was just bluffing. He got the exact information and answer he wanted out of the mothers, when of course the true mother wanted the baby safe, and the false mother wanted neither of them to be happy or to have a son.

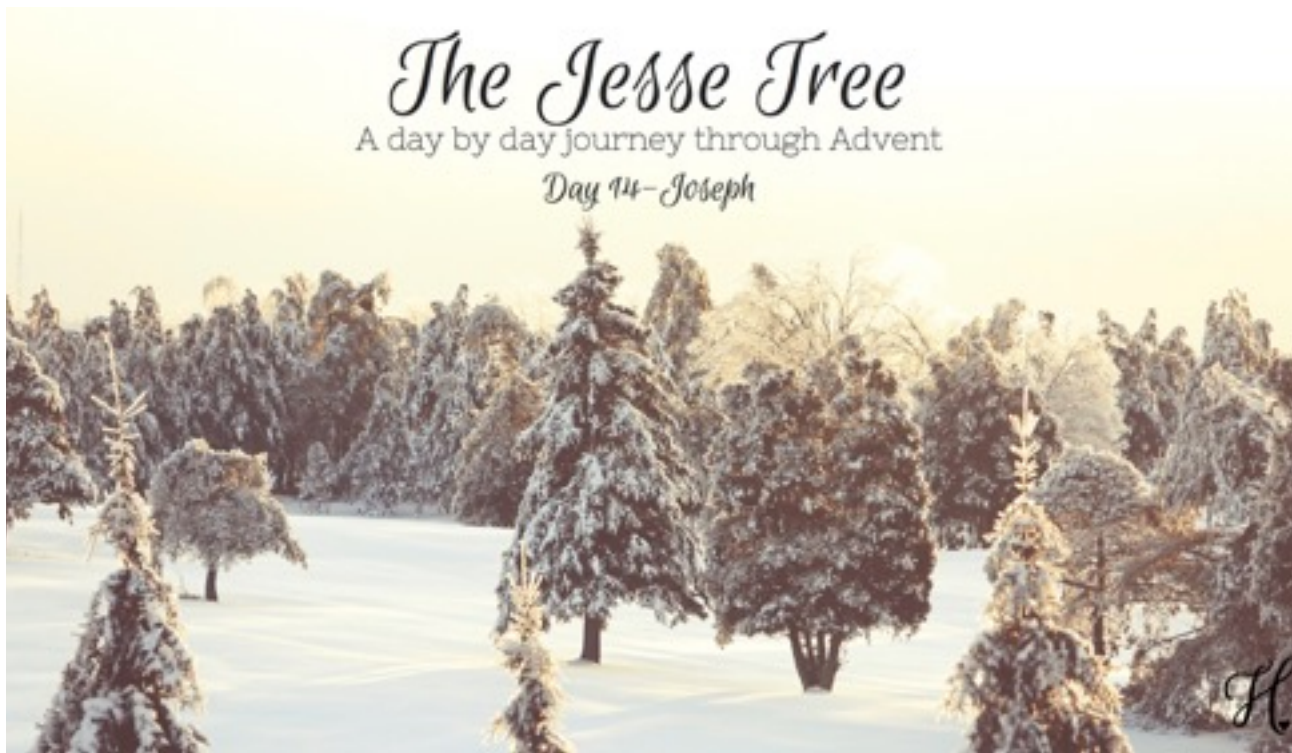
Solomon was able to see through the lies and dishonesty and make the right decision by these two women. It wasn't necessarily "fair" that one of the women had lost her son and one got to keep hers, but life isn't always meant to be fair and equal. Original Sin took that away from us, and no matter how hard it can be to see our neighbors or coworkers doing just a little bit better, there is likely a neighbor or coworker who sees us as THEIR neighbor who is doing better than they are. Life isn't always equal, and it certainly isn't always fair. But one thing remains equal, despite how unfair it is: God's love for us. Is it fair that He loves us all, and loves us unconditionally? Absolutely not. But the Lord loves us so, just the same.

Solomon used his gifts to give back, and to rule his people with a just heart and mind. What gifts are we holding back from the Lord? Is there something we could help out with during the year, not just during the Holiday Season, that we're holding back? It seems like willingness to make time and volunteer is abundant during the Thanksgiving and Christmas time of year, and then winds up being a scarcity during the rest of the year.-Mandi

Reflect: Where are you struggling to accept life's unfairness or inequality?

What can you do to accept and overcome any ungratefulness in your heart over all of the things you DO have?

Act: Make a commitment to give one of your gifts back to the Lord. Whether it's by volunteering at your parish, or by committing to donate to a food pantry in the "off season," think of something you can do, and give back to the Lord.



When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. [Matthew 1:24](#)

Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet[b] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. [Matthew 1:19](#)

Ask anyone in my family to describe me and I bet the word “quiet” wouldn’t pop up, except as a joke. I’ve always been loud, freely shared my thoughts and opinions, and been quick to complain to others if I feel I’ve been wronged.

Joseph isn’t that type of guy, though. Matthew 1:19 tells us that Joseph was a righteous man. He respected the law and customs, but also respected Mary, even though for all appearances she had done him a massive wrong. He planned to divorce her quietly. He didn’t want her to deal with public disgrace. I know if I had been in his situation, I wouldn’t have been so forgiving or thoughtful, but I guess that’s why I’m not a saint yet!

I think it is because of all our differences that I often rely on St. Joseph in prayer when I need the strength to be a better person. He has so many of the virtues that I lack. One of

my favorite facts about Joseph is that he doesn't have any lines of speech in the gospel. Not much of scripture talks about Joseph. In fact, he disappears altogether after the finding of the child Jesus in the temple. Despite how little he appears in scripture, there is a great deal we can learn from Joseph, the first of these being quiet.

Very soon we will be surrounded by family to celebrate Christ's birth. Maybe this will be family we haven't seen in a long time. Maybe it will be family that drives us a little crazy or that we disagree with on political, religious, or social issues. It can be easy to launch into the story of our lives over the past year, or into arguments over who is right and who is wrong, but if St. Joseph teaches us anything, it is that sometimes the best kind of love is a quiet love.

By quiet love I don't mean not asserting and defending your beliefs. I do mean engaging in calm conversation, not complaining in the kitchen or over text message about certain family members who annoy you. I mean listening to others with quiet contemplation. I mean hearing what people have to say. I mean saying only what is good and loving. If there is someone who does wrong to you this holiday season, I hope that St. Joseph will help you to address it one-on-one with the person quietly. As St. Joseph found out, maybe they didn't actually do anything wrong!

Another thing about St. Joseph that we can learn, is doing what God asks even when it is hard or seems wrong. Joseph had every right to divorce Mary, according to the law. It was, in fact, what he planned to do. Joseph was doing Mary a great kindness by planning to do it quietly. But the Lord intervened and commanded Joseph to take Mary as his wife and raise Jesus as his own. What bigger job could a father have? He essentially adopted and raised the son of God. His life could've been free from odd looks and this seemingly impossible task, but Joseph did what God asked even when it seemed against what he should do, even when it seemed hard, even when it seemed impossible, and he did it all with quiet love.



[Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38](#)

One of my favorite movies to watch during the Advent and Christmas season is *The Nativity Story*. It's one of my favorite Bible adaptations because the major characters feel real and approachable. Mary and Joseph seem like intimidating figures to a lot of people, myself included, but this movie depicts them as, well, actual human beings.

There's a wonderful scene in the movie where Joseph and Mary are on their journey to Bethlehem. They stop to rest by the river and contemplate life as parents. Mary wonders if Jesus will show himself as more than just a child and how they will recognize his divinity. Joseph wonders if he'll be able to teach his son anything, knowing that Jesus will be fully God as well as fully human. It's a small moment between the two of them, but it shows that even though they accepted God's will, they still struggled with uncertainty.

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Unfortunately, there was more uncertainty ahead for them. Just when they think they can settle down, they're off to Egypt, fleeing from Herod, and they won't be able to return home for years. That is a lot of change to deal with in about a decade or so.

As someone who feels uncomfortable at the very idea of things being uncertain and doesn't adjust to change all that well, I have no idea how Mary and Joseph were able to handle all the uncertainty and change that happened in their lives. I think that the infancy narratives are a great example of what it means to walk by faith and not by sight.

During this Advent season, we have our own uncertainties to deal with. Some people travel, others accommodate family, and others deal with fears of the future. In spite of the holiday cheer, it's hard to feel merry and bright when we go to sleep with all the uncertainties hanging over our heads.

There is no easy answer to how we need to deal with the uncertainty. Some choose to see a quick fix or an escape. Mary and Joseph provide an example of another way. They made the most of what they had. Mary gave birth in a cave and Joseph placed Jesus in a feeding trough. Most importantly, they accepted God's will and the uncertainty in their lives. Through walking by faith, God was able to provide Mary and Joseph with protection in spite of all the uncertainty.

Hebrews 11:1 says *"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* For this Advent season and in the year to come, walk by faith with Mary and Joseph. -Monque

Reflect: What are some uncertainties that you're currently dealing with?
How well do you adjust to changes in your life, even the sudden ones?

Act: Ask Mary and Joseph to help you deal with your uncertainties.



[Mark 1:1-8](#)

I love watching trailers to movies. The purpose of a movie trailer is to give the audience a sneak preview of things to come. Sometimes, the trailers are actually better than the movie, while other times, the movie is worth the hype. John the Baptist was, in essentials, a personal trailer for Jesus's public ministry.

He got everyone's attention by offering something they needed, but never had:

"John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins."

The Jews already had the tradition of the mikveh, a cleansing ritual where people would immerse themselves in water to cleanse themselves of their sins. However, John the Baptist was offering this ritual in the River Jordan, outside of the temple. This was probably

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especially appealing to those who were on the outskirts of society, the ones who didn't feel worthy to darken the temple doors.

It also helped that John the Baptist stood out in such an unusual way:

"John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey."

He went to the extremes of living the desert life. He probably reminded people of Moses and Elijah, the prophets who lived out in the desert and ate whatever they could find there. So John already had a lot going as far as getting people's attention. He advocated repentance and forgiveness and stood out in contrast to the finely dressed Pharisees and Sadducees.

But what was John hyping up? The coming of Jesus.

"And this is what he proclaimed: 'One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'"

Now that to me sounds like a lot of amazing hype. Many people were already following John the Baptist because he was a radical. So if John the Baptist was worth following, then whomever John was talking about had to be even better!

Pope Francis tweeted *"Prophecy is saying that there is something truer, more beautiful, greater, of greater good to which we are all called."* I think John the Baptist can inspire us to follow in his example by bringing Christ to those who feel like they're on the outside.

While there are those who are openly hostile to Christians, there are just as many people who have been broken by life. The first step in any rehabilitation program is helping the person to admit that they have a problem. We need to meet these people where they are and tell them that they can get a second chance and hopefully lead them to Jesus. My sisters in Christ, trust me when I say that He is worth the hype. *-Monique*

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Reflect: How do you spread the good news to those who aren't Christians?
Have you ever shared Jesus with someone who felt like they were on the outside looking in? What was that experience like?

Act: Reach out to someone who feels like they're on the outskirts of life. Be a friend to them first. Don't treat them like a project or a mission. Meet that person where they are.



[Sirach 24:3 Wisdom 8:1](#)

Oh Highest Wisdom Come!

O Wisdom, you came forth from the mouth of the Most High and, reaching from beginning to end, you ordered all things mightily and sweetly. Come, and teach us the way of prudence.

Beginning December 17th, the O Antiphons will be recited preceding the Magnificat during Vespers of the Liturgy of the Hours. Each antiphon features a title for Christ and, additionally, references the second coming of our Lord. Evidence of the O Antiphons can be seen in the advent song "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

The first O Antiphon, "Jesus is Wisdom," fills me with a similar feeling I had whenever I would listen to my grandpa tell stories about his time in the service. His fingers were thick and rough from working on the farm, the back of his head was bald, surrounded by short soft grey hair. His head smelled like tobacco and sweat. His laugh was loud and hearty. He was soft, warm, and affectionate. He was the perfect little old man. I kid you not, he literally knew everything.

In the first antiphon, Jesus IS wisdom. He knows all and sees all. He is the one that lights the path of our entire life. When I was a child, I looked up to my grandpa-he was my everything. My grandfather, while totally amazing, was human like all the rest of us. Jesus however, sits at the right hand of our Creator. I'm thinking the thought "Jesus is Wisdom" is quite true. Advent is a wonderful time to begin to put your total and complete trust in the Lord.

During the advent season we start to prepare for the birth of Christ (and let's not forget Santa!) We get caught up in the decorations, the gifts, the parties. Lovely sisters, I'm sure we are all guilty of that! While attending mass this weekend the priest suggested we do the following during Advent: sit quietly, close your eyes, and imagine the Christ child in your lap. Stroke His hair, tickle His toes, kiss His sweet little cheeks. Let the peace that comes from that moment wash over you. While you scurry around, and worry about various things, think about the Child, and think about all of the wisdom He holds. That baby you are holding-He is the Alpha and the Omega. Take all of your worries, all of your doubts, and your giant Christmas to do list and throw it out. Remember, Jesus IS wisdom. He knows everything and has great plans for you.

-Ashley

Reflect: One last thought that I will leave with you before I sign off-during vacation bible school, we would often sing the song "Thy Word" I think the chorus is very fitting. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." His word will provide guidance. Let Him guide you through this busy season.

Act: Remember to take some time during the day to visit with our sweet Baby Jesus.



[Exodus 3:13-15; 20:1-7, 1 Kings 8:17-18, Hebrews 1:1](#)

Back when I was in college, I wrote an essay on the name of God for my philosophy class, using Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles* as my main source. "What's in a name?" I asked, quoting Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

A name is a very powerful thing to have. According to Aquinas, the name of a thing says something about the thing itself. In a series of videos analyzing Harry Potter through the lens of the Catholic Faith, Fr. Nicholas Marie Monco says "a name points to the reality of the thing." A name reveals something about the thing. As a writer, I pay attention to names. The name of God is especially important because his true name reveals that He is being itself. "I AM." Through Jesus, God reveals Himself fully to us as an invitation for a personal relationship with Him. Knowing someone's name gives us a degree of intimacy with them.

This ties into the first two commandments: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not have other gods beside me. You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or serve them...You shall not invoke the name of the Lord, your God, in vain. For the Lord will not leave unpunished anyone who invokes his name in vain."

We may not bow down before statues of cows, but we have made idols out of things like politics and an "us vs them" mentality. We can make idols out of ideologies, the opinions and approval of others, even having the latest Apple products. When anything takes precedence over the will of God, it becomes our idol.

The prayer of the Our Father reminds us to turn back to the Lord. *"Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name..."* To be hallowed means to be holy. When we say *"hallowed be thy name,"* we are giving reverence to God's name. We are called to a greater intimacy with Him. God is asking us to call Him *"Father"* and to invoke His name in our prayers. Let us all draw closer to Jesus, our Lord and our God. -Monique

Reflect: Is there anything in your life that you treat as your *"idol"*? What are the idols in your life? How is your personal relationship with God?

Act: Pray an Our Father and ask God to help you get closer to Him.

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