

From the Pastor
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 25, 2010



In Part 4 of my *'she sells sea shells by the seashore'* tongue twisting Sacred Sign & Symbol Summer Study Series we consider a symbol that once confused me very much! Occasionally the entire student body of my

Elementary School, Saint Paul's in Irvington, walked to a local public school to see plays put on by travelling troupes. One time we walked all the way to Irvington High School where someone was perplexed to see the same three letters seen in my parish church on floor mats, bulletin boards and stage curtains: IHS. So one day he asked our pastor why the Irvington High School letters, IHS, were in our church! I remember the story so well because it was the now-Father Tom Serafin, who for years was teased about it ... and was often asked what IHS stood for! What does it mean? Well first, some more things IHS is NOT!

IHS is NOT a Latin acronym for the words, "Jesus Hominum Salvator," which means "Jesus Savior of Mankind." Nor is it "Jesus Hierosolyma Salvator" - "Jesus, Savior of Jerusalem." Nor is it English initials for "In His Service" as I once heard a Protestant say, though her explanation was far better than Fr. Tom's *'Irvington High School!'*

IHS, as seen on a communion wafer above, are the first three letters of the Greek word for Jesus: Iota, Eta, Sigma. Our Lord's full Name in Greek is IΗΣΟΥΣ. Why they shortened it to just three letters remains a mystery, but from the 3rd Century on the Holy Name of Jesus was usually presented in its abbreviated form. Like the ancient 'Chi-Rho' explained in last week's bulletin IHS went in and out of popularity over the centuries. [For past articles go to our parish website and click on bulletins: www.stmaryrutherford.org]

But unlike Chi-Rho, HIS is rarely found in ancient catacombs; its extensive use began in the 8th Century and became popular during the later Middle Ages: 1000-1500. The IHS monogram was propagated in the 1100's by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who promoted devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus; he who added one word to the already popular prayer, 'Ave Maria' or 'Hail Mary' to make it hinge on the Holy Name of Jesus by placing it at the center of this biblical prayer. The

first half of the 'Hail Mary' is a direct quote from Luke's Gospel; the second half highlights Mary's role as intercessor as seen in John 2:1-12 when, at the Wedding Feast of Cana, she interceded for the newlyweds, prompting Jesus to perform His first miracle: changing water into wine. The 'Hail Mary' ends by asking Mary to do for us what she did for Jesus: remain with us always, now and at the hour of our death, as we breathe our last.

In the 1400's the Franciscan Saint Bernadine of Sienna promoted IHS as a symbol of peace. And in 1541 Saint Ignatius Loyola added three nails below the IHS and surrounded it by the sun; this became the seal of the Order which he founded: the Jesuits. Blessed John Colombini [1300-1367] and Saint Vincent Ferrer [1315-1419] also promoted its use.



Why is IHS or the Holy Name of Jesus so important? Look at what Sacred Scripture says.

Saint Paul proclaimed, "... God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." [Philippians 2:9-11] When the Apostles were on trial by the Sanhedrin, the high priest said to them, "We gave you strict orders, did we not, to stop teaching in that name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and want to bring this man's blood upon us. After recalling the Apostles, they had them flogged, ordered them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name." [Acts 5:27-28; 40-41]

Saint Peter also wrote, "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." [1 Peter 4:14] Do you respect the Holy Name of Jesus? What do you suffer because you call on Jesus' Name?

With God's love and my prayers,

Father Mike

Reverend Michael J. Kreder