



Every once in a while, a name carries extra meaning. Jesus, our Savior, our hope that not even sin can separate us from God's love. There is so, *so* much meaning there. And also, today, it invites us to dig deeper into names we've been given, or the names of the ones who have made an impact on our life. So, I want to tell you about a woman named Agnes. Now, I'm sure at one point in history that was a rather famous name for girls, but let's just say that one didn't come up when Sarah and I

were trying to figure out a name for ours. Nevertheless, Agnes supposedly means pure or holy, because the original St. Agnes died as a virgin teenager back in the early 300's. In the Catholic Church, she is considered to be the patron saint of young girls, among other things.

Except, when I got to meet this particular Agnes, she wasn't exactly a "young girl" anymore. Instead, she was approaching 100 years of life on this earth. She would become one of my monthly homebound visits, taking her Communion and just checking in to see how she was doing. She was in a nursing home, with some neighbors who were not exactly the most pleasant individuals to hear when I approached her room. And although Agnes had more than her right to complain and be down-in-the-dumps, thinking that 100 years was more than enough time to have done this and that in this life; somebody forgot to tell Agnes that it was more than okay to just sit in her wheelchair and stare out the window from her room. Instead, she would insist on going out to the main dining hall for meals as well as for crafts and Bible studies and outdoor activities in between. Someone forgot to tell Agnes that it was more than okay to not be a "young girl" anymore once you reached whatever advanced age. Evidently, she didn't care, because the first time she ever rode on a plane was not until she was 90 years young. As the speeds reached 600-plus miles per hour, Agnes was asked how her first flight was going, and she responded, "We're hardly moving!" She was used to her own feet going from place to place in living life to the fullest as much as she possibly could for as long as her body would manage.

Safe to say, when I stopped by, she was not always in her room, but she never minded me pushing her wheelchair back to her bedside, because after some catching up and checking in, it was time for Communion. It was time for her to hear the name of the one who loved her unconditionally, no matter what her age or energy level or the state of her mind, because by the time I came around, although Agnes did her fair share of pushing her own wheelchair throughout the entire establishment, her memory was not quite there anymore. She could no longer remember the name of her deceased husband or children. Depending on the day, she may or may not remember me. And yet, without fail, when it came time for us to share the meal that Jesus came to life for: she could still say the Lord's Prayer by heart, and when we concluded our time with our own personal prayers, there was always a little something more when the name Jesus came along. There was a little more love, a little more depth, a little more of all Agnes had to give when that precious name was mentioned; as if that is what the Messiah came to life for, too. No matter her age, energy level, state of mind, that name, that hope, that Great News that not even sin can separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ: brought Agnes to the height of joy, even from her wheelchair.

So, yes, I may remember Agnes because that name isn't quite as popular as it used to be, but I remember Agnes in her own way embodying what the Catholic Church claims their saint to be: one of "young girls," because the Agnes I knew did her absolute best to be a precious child of God at heart even at 100 years of age. And even though her name literally may mean pure or holy, Agnes would never say she was at all. Only Jesus was born to be that, and that's all that was needed for Agnes and all of us. She knew she didn't have to be pure or holy. She knew she didn't have to live up to that part of her name. Such meanings for names do not end up having to define our entire life, because we only need the meaning behind one. We only need the meaning of hope and love and grace that came to fruition in Bethlehem.

At 100 years of age, Agnes could very well have stayed in her room and looked out the window wondering if she had done enough, wondering if God could truly love her if she didn't quite live up to her name. Evidently, Agnes was under the impression that was all taken care of in Jesus Christ, so she might as well get busy in keeping on living for as long as she could. So, on this day, we give thanks for the most blessed assurance we have in the only name that matters, Jesus Christ our Lord, still Emmanuel, still God-with-us now and forevermore. Thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!