

# The Church of Saint Pascal Baylon

Fr. Mike Byron, Pastor: Sunday Homily

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A couple of months ago I wrote about my homeroom teacher in 9<sup>th</sup> grade at Edina-West High School. I wrote that I hadn't had any communication with her in more than 40 years, but I sent off a letter to her in February just to say thank you for caring about me, and us, during an impressionable time of life.

And she wrote back!

And it was a beautiful letter, explaining to me—among other things—that while she was not raised as a Catholic she had always been in love with the beauty of Catholic liturgy—especially in the solemn rituals of Easter—compared with the worship of her Protestant experience, which she found boring and tedious. I had mentioned in my letter that it was likely that she wouldn't have any memory of me. I was kind of a goofy kid, but not a particularly strong student or otherwise a standout. She would not have had any reason to keep me in mind. And since then, over all the decades, how many hundreds or thousands of kids must she have taught? Just in my own graduating class were 563 students.

But she remembered me. She remembered who were my closest friends in school and she named them. She remembered the name that we gave to the dead fly that we found on the window sill in the classroom and preserved in a jar for the whole year. And in her return letter to me she included a photocopy of the inscription that I had written in her yearbook in May 1974. (Which was sarcastic and stupid). She remembered me. She remembered my name. What greater gift could I have received from her than that?

In the city of Jerusalem today, the large memorial garden to the victims of the Holocaust is called *Yad v'Shem*, which is Hebrew for "Hard and Name". It's a reference to a passage in the Prophet Isaiah which describes the importance of remembering a name as being more significant than the relationship between a parent and a child. Love is proven by remembering one's name, by honoring the being that you are. You and no one else.

Before every funeral that takes place here at St. Pascal's we request that a relative of the deceased inscribe his/her name into a "Book of the Living", which we honor by placing it prominently up front here during the liturgy. In our Judeo-Christian tradition, it is no small thing to remember a name. It is a demonstration of love, and a commitment that will live forever. This weekend here at our parish we will celebrate two baptisms, and as we always do in those events, the first question that the parents will be asked is, "What is his/her name?" The name is precious. The name is eternal. The name. The name. Today's Sacred Scriptures recall for us, as they do every year at Easter, the Lord who is our Good Shepherd. And the importance of that metaphor is not so much that this shepherd does a bunch of good things for us—like leading us and keeping us safe from danger and imparting wisdom to us. That's all good too.

But the real gift of the Good Shepherd is that he *remembers* us, our name, the story of our life, our joys and agonies, our hopes and regrets. The Good Shepherd *knows* us. Every one of us. Uniquely. By name. Like my homeroom teacher from High School. He *remembers*.

For Jesus, this business about being our savior and redeemer isn't just about a *function*. It's about love, and relationship, and finding us in our darkest, scariest moments and calling us by name in order to console us and make us strong.

And the same compassion that he has for us is limitless. It extends to *everybody*. The fact that my old teacher remembers me does not give me any reason to think that she doesn't remember a whole lot of other kids too with the same care and affection. And how could I dare to presume that I'm the most important person of her list of former students? Surely, I am not.

In today's gospel, Jesus reminds his disciples that "I have other sheep who do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they too will hear my voice..." It can only be sin that causes people who love and follow Christ to believe that therefore they are able to distinguish *other* people whom Christ *cannot* or does not love. We Christians have been doing that from the beginning, and it's wrong. God's love is never a zero-sum game, such that God's love for me must mean less love for you or for others. We are not in the business of defining people *out* of God's boundless mercy. We are not the only people whom he remembers by name and when we tell ourselves otherwise we become unfaithful to our own story.

So let our Easter joy be selfless—not confined to me or to us or to others who are pretty much like us, according to us. The Resurrection story is so marvelous because it is so big. More for others doesn't mean less for us. Love is not a commodity to be rationed. It is a reality to be rejoiced over! So let us do exactly that.