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What names do you have for God? In addition to calling on God as Allah, Muslims use prayer beads (misbaha) to contemplate 99 names for God. As Catholics, perhaps our clearest God-naming prayer is the Gloria Patri, which praises God as Father, Son and Spirit and proclaims our belief in the eternal goodness of the Trinity.

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[July 19, 2020](#)

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

Psalm 86

Romans 8:26-27

Matthew 13:24-43

In recent decades, we've seen alternative versions, one of which highlights God's outreach to humanity by calling on God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. A more philosophical rendition refers to the Source of All Being, Eternal Word and Indwelling Spirit. Traditionally, Catholics also prayed "The Divine Praises" honoring God's holy name, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

But even with all of that, most of us might be hard-pressed to articulate 15, much less 99 names for God. Our Muslim sisters and brothers might pity us for a lack of theological knowledge, creativity or piety.

Today's readings don't give us divine names, but they do invite us to engage our hearts and imaginations when we think about God. That's particularly important because, no matter what creedal statements we might have memorized, our interior awareness of God forms our real spirituality and theology. Our experiences of prayer and communion form our ideals and aspirations. Today's readings touch into all of that.

Our first reading, chosen to reflect on the Gospel, comes from the Book of Wisdom, a work written less than a century before the time of Jesus to remind the Jewish people

of the wealth of their tradition and the wonders of their God. This selection describes their God not only as different from the fickle and jealous Greek and Roman gods but also the antithesis of people generally regarded as important.

Wisdom's reflection begins by proclaiming God's majesty: "There is none like you who have mastery over all." Conventional expectations quickly fly out the window as the author prays: "Your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all."

This asserts that the God of Israel exercises divine power through forgiving offenses. It's an amazing statement that reminds us that the power of forgiveness breaks the chain of cause and effect, creating alternatives to the inevitable. God's omnipotence is revealed in the clemency that heals ruptured relationships.

Then comes the clincher: "You taught your people by these deeds, that they must be kind." That's a restatement of Leviticus 19, where God tells the Israelites, "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."

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This means that the kind and holy people of God should create a society in which their relationships mirror God's character. Jesus refers to that society as the kingdom of heaven.

In today's first parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a farmer whose carefully tended crop was despoiled by jealous subversives, people so nasty and petty that they went to all the trouble of sowing weed seeds in his wheat field. His servants were infuriated when they saw their cultivations defiled. But before they could rip out the intruder plants, the owner warned that their destructive fury could wreck everything.

Jesus then interpreted this parable by telling two more featuring his humor and ridiculous hyperbole. First, obviously referring to the wheat field, he said that the kingdom proliferates like a mustard seed, which everybody recognized as an irrepressible weed. Next, he compared it to a woman who blended yeast into 40 pounds of flour, an amount that would have called for a full team of kneaders.

What are we to glean from these? Among other things, the mustard parable suggests that the kingdom of heaven is much less "pure" than some think it should

be. The baker woman's mountainous mound of dough demonstrates heaven's abundance where there's room and food enough for everyone.

At the end of the reading, we get caught in one of Jesus' parable traps. Just as we're rejoicing that the evil ones get the fire they deserve, we remember that the owner sowed mustard seed on purpose. That takes us back to the first story in which Jesus warned that we risk ruin when we judge between wheat and weeds.

These parables circle round to question us on a couple of topics. First, what is there in creation that we know God doesn't want in the kingdom of heaven? Second, who are we to judge?

Finally, we might ask if we've learned additional names for God after being caught up in these parables? Islam's first names for God are "The All Compassionate" and "The All Merciful."

Our readings suggest that we might address God as the "Ever-Forgiving," the "Teller of Tricky Tales" and the "Source of Boundless Energy and Abundance." How else might we recognize God's love, humor and generosity?

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