
ON YOUR NAME, "PEREGRINUS"

Version: 27 November 2015

Dear Peregrinus (12:15 PM, Friday):

A friend of mine asked me (she was not the only one who has) about your "unusual" name, what it meant.

It had not occurred to me to wonder about your name, and so I thought that I would write to you what I have thought about it.

Poetically, and without much investigation of your name, I have associated it with the Peregrine Falcon (Latin, *falco peregrinus*), about which the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (Online) writes in brief description: "Powerful and fast-flying, the Peregrine Falcon hunts medium-sized birds, dropping down on them from high above in a spectacular stoop." And your name resonates for me even more when I recognize how this Falcon is often confused with another fierce but smaller Falcon called the "Merlin" (whose Arthurian association is clear). I have also associated your name, therefore, with the sheer power and speed of the Peregrine's hunting stoop - its famous plunge down through the sky, reaching speeds of 200 miles per hour, becoming at that point the swiftest bird on the planet.

This is a bird that knows what it wants ... and goes after it, once it spots it, with spectacular abandon.

But my Latin training knows that your first name has its source in a second declension Latin adjective, *peregrinus -a -um* which means "coming from foreign parts, foreign, alien, or exotic." In Latin this adjective is used to specify *a kind of person*, rather than a kind of chair or animal or piece of personal armament - "That one is not from these parts," we hear a local sheriff say.

In this regard we might consider, the second Divine Person, about Whom St. Paul writes in his Letter to the Philippians 2:6-7 (*J.B. Philips New Testament*) the following:

Let Christ himself be your example as to what your attitude should be. For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man.

Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnation of the second Divine Person, is, we might say, a Person “coming from foreign parts”; Jesus *Peregrinus*.

So, you could consider your name as expressing something that you feel is true about yourself; namely, that at some fundamental level of awareness you know that you do not *belong* here, that even in your best moments you experience yourself as only *for* here, not *from* here, and only *through* here for a time. I hear this awareness in Jesus’ remark before Pontius Pilate, saying at John 18:36 (*New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*):

John 18: 36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

In later Latin, *peregrinus* as an adjective was applied to animals, especially birds, to describe certain kinds as “migratory.” In this sense, a “peregrine” bird is one that migrates. This means that it has built deep inside of its being an awareness that its home is not *here* ... but *there*, and seasonally feels a compulsion to go there. Perhaps, Peregrinus, your name again resonates to your inner sense of not belonging *here*, but *there*, and knowing it clearest whenever you feel powerfully bloom within you the compulsion to go, to migrate ... where?

Because of the association of *peregrinus* with “migratory,” about this time the Latin adjective became a noun, through Anglo-Norman and Middle French influences in the 14th century, and named a religious person. Such a person feels a call, a summons, to leave what normally he or she calls home and to travel far, and through many trials, to a holy shrine to pray, to make petitions before God at that shrine, and to confess the sins of his or her life and to be absolved of them in Christ.

And so, through all of these transformations, your name dear Peregrinus, came to be the English noun “pilgrim.” More and more I have come to understand my own life, even at its best, as that of a pilgrim. Perhaps this is why you and I were meant to be friends.

My friend asked me about your “unusual” name, and how right this now seems, seeing that the very meaning of your name implies “unusual” – a person not from these parts. But as a result I will now be ready to answer for your name if someone in the future asks me about it. Your name is a beautiful and important one, which captures something true about the deepest part of our human existence as being “in the world, but not (quite) of it.” You are on the Way, but you also know the Way, because you have a “homing” instinct in-built you ... if Peregrinus be your name.