

The New Name and the Little White Stone

"To the one who overcomes...I will give him a little white stone and on the stone a new name is written which no one knows except the one who receives it" (Rev 2,17).

It seems very improbable that the new name is intended for the one who receives the little stone, since it would be known only to him and to the one who gave it to him. What use is a name that is known by only two people? Further on in the text, in fact, it is explained to whom the new name really belongs: *"...and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the City of my God, of the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name" (Rev 3,12).*

The new name, then, belongs to the one who is speaking these words: to the risen Lord, who appears to the author of the Apocalypse at the beginning of his revelation (1,10-20) and again at the end of it (19,11-16). At this final manifestation, the author notes that the Lord *"has a name written which no one knows except himself...and his name has been called the Word of God"* (19,12.13). The use of the past tense in reference to his name, indicates that this name, the Word of God, is the old name of the Lord, and leads us to understand that the name 'which no one knows except himself' is his new name.

There is, then, a notable correspondence between the visible form of the risen Lord and the little white stone promised to the one who overcomes (cf. 1 Pet 2,4; Zech 3,9): both have the mysterious new name of the Lord written on them. The little white stone can therefore be understood as a symbol of the risen Lord, offered in anticipation of his final manifestation at the end of time (19,11-16). To understand the purpose of such a symbol, we should imagine it set in a ring and used as a seal by the one that is given authority to exercise the regal power of the Lord (cf. 2,26; 3,21; 5,10; 20,4).

It only remains to explain how the Lord's new and mysterious name, 'which no one knows except himself' (19,12), can be the same name as that which is written on the little white stone, and comes to be known also by the one who receives it (2,17). There is no contradiction here. What is implied, in fact, is that the Lord reveals this new name only by means of the gift of himself, symbolised, as we have seen, by the gift of the little white stone. The one who receives the little white stone and so comes to know the new name, knows it only by virtue of the indwelling presence of the risen Lord, who therefore does not cease to be the only one who knows it (cf. Luke 10,22; Jn 17,26).

What could this new name be, then, if not one that indicates the intimate association of the risen Lord with the one who knows it? Such is the case with a name like 'Immanu-El', that is to say 'God is with us' (Is 7,14).