

Along the track

Happy in the New Year

When you think about it, so much of our life is repetitive. We get up at the same time, follow a very similar routine each morning, we go to work at the same time and do pretty much the same thing there most days. Weekends might include some different activities but then again...? When do we give ourselves the chance to explore, to dream, to be creative, to try new activities, to try new ways of thinking? And why is that important anyway?

According to Albert Einstein, insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results! New Year gives us a chance to think about that – it's probably one reason why we make New Year's Resolutions. Sometimes just doing the same things, following the same routine can help us get through the tough times but that can also numb our creativity, our sense of adventure – we can get stuck in a rut, not just career-wise or in our relationships, attitudes and ways of seeing and doing things but in our faith as well.

I sometimes meet people today who tell me that they no longer believe, they no longer have faith. In reality many of them have rejected religion and religious beliefs and they seem to be ignoring the faith that is still within them, the faith that calls them to be curious, to seek meaning and purpose, the faith that calls them to address their spiritual thirst. Too often they reject a set of religious beliefs that suited them as a child but they have not sought a greater knowledge or understanding of them as they have matured. We wouldn't accept that in other fields, so why would we find that acceptable that with our faith?

So here's some suggestions for New Year's resolutions.

Pope Francis urges us to 'go outside'. In that way we might develop 'a habit of observation of natural beauties that surround us' and, in doing that, 'we develop the fundamentally human attitudes of silence, listening, patient waiting, admiration, discovery of harmony, respect for the natural equilibrium of nature, the meaning of gratitude and contemplation. Observing and caring for nature helps us discover the beauty and wonder of God', he said. That's an impressive list! Often that means just putting away for a while the iPad or iPhone or whatever other electronic device we may have and getting outside. Cultivating that habit of observation and with it a sense of wonder is important, no matter what age we may be. We often associate that just with children. Big mistake! Firstly, awe and wonder are gifts from the Holy Spirit. We receive them at Baptism and again at Confirmation. They are the building blocks of faith, the cornerstone, as it were. They are gifts for every stage of life. If we let them, they keep on giving. Awe and wonder take us out of ourselves – they can also help us to realise that 'I am not the centre of the universe, the be all and end all.'

Going outside can also be a source of great joy. Joy is essential to the spiritual life. Pope Francis reminded us of that in his first encyclical, *The Joy of the Gospel*. Joy is also one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit but, just like the gifts of awe and wonder, it needs to be used. Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge that God loves us and, in St Paul's words, nothing can separate us from the love of God

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God (Rom 3:38).

Joy does not simply happen. We have to choose joy and keep on choosing it. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and joy is the experience of knowing that we are loved unconditionally and that nothing — sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death — can't take that love away.

So take every day as a gift. It is. Every day offers new opportunities, new experiences, new challenges. Don't let fear define the limits of what you can do in life. Fear can play an inordinate role in our lives. Of itself, fear is not a bad thing, after all we developed that sense because there are some things we ought to be very, very wary of - crocodiles, edges of cliffs, excessive speed, poison and so on. We developed fear because it helps keep us alive. But sometimes it is a lot easier to say "I couldn't do that" than to ask ourselves "What am I really afraid of?" Doing the same things over and over may bring comfort and a sense of security, but does it bring growth and development? That applies to us at every age. One of the most common phrases used in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures is "Do not be afraid". 365 times in fact. It is usually followed by the phrase "I am with you".

So make this New Year a great one – joy-filled, creative and adventurous and, in Pope Francis' words, leave room in our daily lives for the God of Surprises.

* Catechism of the Catholic Church #158, General Directory for Catechesis # 92)

Regards
Jim Quillinan

Email: jquillinan@dcsi.net.au