

JANUARY 1
SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

A Year of New Days

For nothing will be impossible for God.

Luke 1:37

I love to flip the cover on a new calendar. Not yet coffee-stained or burdened under the scrawl of too many commitments, its pages hold the potential for vast possibilities. Staring at the unfilled dates that will soon be overflowing, I feel a fleeting yet brilliant modicum of control.

What a joy to look at a year full of days, to imagine, and to wonder! Our planned traditions, events, and activities are coming. And the many surprises, known only to God, which will soon grace these pages? Those are coming as well.

Today, sitting by my spangled Christmas tree, listening to the crackle of a winter's fire as my family slumbers upstairs, I will do what I always do: form resolutions and inscribe them in my new calendar. Admittedly, I often fall short of these self-inflicted goals. Yet the optimist in me recognizes the incredible grace of cooperating with God's perfect plan for my life, so I persist.

I love to imagine God smiling down on my little "resolved" memos. How often I struggle with the same shortcomings. How amazing that God, in his bounty, showers forgiveness time and time again, loving me through it all, even the messes. And how beautiful that in the dawn of every morning, each new year, such vast potential for growth, for discovery, for renewal, and for love unfolds before me.

Mother Mary, in celebration of your spotless fiat, this year will be my gift to my Creator, to my loved ones, and to our world. Draw me ever closer to your Son.

To Ponder: What spiritual, familial, and personal goals do you have for the coming year?

LISA M. HENDEY

JANUARY 2

Come, Holy Spirit

Acquire the Holy Spirit and thousands around you
will acquire salvation.

Saint Seraphim of Sarov

Saint Seraphim dreamed big. Honored by both the Roman Catholic (today) and Orthodox (January 15) traditions, this wonderworker emphasized seeking communion with God as the true purpose of life for every Christian. Saint Seraphim's life demonstrated that everything else was merely the means for "acquiring the Holy Spirit."

Wait! Didn't we acquire the Holy Spirit at Baptism, and weren't we sealed with the gift of the Spirit at Confirmation? Can't we acquire more of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Reconciliation or when we receive the Eucharist? A resounding "yes" to all of these.

How do we acquire the Holy Spirit when we are alone, frustrated, and confused?

A prayer that works anywhere, anytime: "Come, Holy Spirit!" This calms us and brings us into communion with God.

This is a prayer for clarity murmured first thing in the morning before you are sure what day it is or what you'll face. It's a prayer for perseverance when you find joy in what you are accomplishing until interruptions disrupt your every intention.

You can say this quick prayer in the middle of a traffic jam, an argument with your boss, or a bout with the flu—all means of acquiring the Holy Spirit.

Saint Seraphim doesn't promise that this prayer will change everything around you—just those in your growing circle of influence. Wait for it and watch it happen!

Come, Holy Spirit! Be my companion throughout the day and help me respond in a way that brings others closer to you.

To Ponder: We all have difficult people in our lives. How can invoking the Holy Spirit help you when you are with such people?

NANCY H. C. WARD

JANUARY 3

In Gratitude for the Small Things

Enjoy the little things in life because one day you will look back and realize they were the big things.

Anonymous

As we enter into the endless possibilities of the new year—a long-awaited graduation or dream job, a marriage or the

birth of a child, a long-anticipated vacation or even retirement—this quote challenges us to acknowledge the grace and blessing of this very moment. We must be careful not to miss the beauty of the little things of today, for life can change in an instant.

Ours changed in an instant when my husband fell and severely injured his knee. For weeks he was confined to the upper floor of our two-story home. As I assumed the new roles of being a caregiver and a room service attendant, I found myself missing our former life together: our weekly date nights, leisurely walks, even grocery shopping together; I longed for all of those little things to return to my life.

In this new year, I invite you to find great joy in the ordinary things in life, for each is a gift from God. Savor your morning cup of coffee, tuck a love note into your children's lunches, carve out time in your busy schedule for God and just sit. Breathe in and savor the blessings of the day.

Lord, fill my heart with joy and gratitude for the people, places, and events in my life.

To Ponder: Reflect on your own life. What small things can you be grateful for today?

DR. MARY AMORE

JANUARY 4
SAINT ELIZABETH ANN SETON

*Start with
a Heart for God*

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

Do you ever wonder how it is that we are supposed to be able to faithfully weave together taking care of our families and using our gifts outside the home? Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first native-born American saint, sets a fantastic example.

Although best known for establishing the first free Catholic school system and the first congregation of religious sisters in America, Saint Elizabeth was also the biological mother of five children and the foster mother of six. Quick math says that she had *eleven* children in her care before indoor plumbing, refrigeration, or microwaves had been invented!

What secret did Saint Elizabeth possess that allowed her not only to care for such a large family, but also to establish not one, but two Catholic institutions in a social and economic age dominated primarily by Protestant men?

I propose that her “secret” lies not in some great personal-professional balancing act, but in her enduring love for God. Because of this all-consuming love, God was able to redeem the many challenges of her life: losing her mother at age three, the rejection of her stepmother, early widowhood (at age twenty-nine), and the death of two of her own

children. These trials gave Saint Elizabeth a heart for the orphan, the sick, and the dying, and it was this heart that willingly said “yes” when called to serve God outside as well as inside her home.

Father, thank you for all the circumstances of my life.

To Ponder: What could you do to fall more deeply in love with God? How might this help you serve God both inside and outside your home?

HEIDI BRATTON

JANUARY 5

Tying the Knot

Love is trinity.

Venerable Fulton J. Sheen

Whenever I present the subject of marriage to my group of teens, I always begin by handing each of them a rope and getting them to pair off. “You have thirty seconds,” I say, “to take two pieces of rope and braid them together—and no knots!” Frenzied fingers and laughing ensues. I then hand each pair a third rope. A timed race begins again and ropes are twisted into braids with ease. Now they may “tie the knot”!

“A threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl 4:12). In strong marriages, God is the central piece around whom a couple’s lives are braided. Without him, we quickly fall apart. It was this way from the beginning, when God called the first man and first woman into communion with each other and with him.

As the creator of marriage, God strengthens couples to witness to his love in the world with a love strong and faithful to the end. The task can seem as challenging as braiding two ropes, which is why we must remember the third. How many times I have begged God to throw us the third rope of his presence and save us! Then we set about the work of re-braiding. He teaches us about the sacrifices necessary to weave our separate wills into his own. This joy is a foretaste of the eternal marriage in heaven where we will be one with God.

Holy Trinity, you want our marriage to image your love in three persons. Teach us to turn to you in all things.

To Ponder: Marriage truly tests just how selfless we can be. Do you need to ask God to “throw you a rope”—or to help you re-braid what has been divided?

CINDY COSTELLO

JANUARY 6
EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Overwhelmed with Joy

Always remember this: life is a journey.

It is a path, a journey to meet Jesus.

Pope Francis

The blessing of seeking is in the finding of the gift hidden under wraps, the answer to the question, the destination at journey's end. Epiphany celebrates the “showing” of Jesus,

the Son of God. Jesus was the Messiah of Israel, but also the Christ to the Gentiles, a Savior for all.

Scripture describes the wise men from the East yearning to meet this child king. Aided in their pilgrimage by the appearance of a star, their travels were an outward expression of an inner journey: they were seeking God.

“And there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy” (Mt 2:9–10). This was more than simple relief after concluding a long journey; the wise men’s joy sprung from a personal encounter, the fulfillment of the longing at the center of every human heart.

“Upon entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Mt 2:11). After kneeling before Jesus, the wise men bestowed lavish treasures upon him. Yet his presence bestowed on them the greatest gift of all.

Jesus, may I seek you and greet you with overwhelming joy!

To Ponder: Did you know the word *monstrance* (the elaborate container that holds the consecrated host) comes from the Latin *monstrare*, “to show”? Why not make a small pilgrimage seeking the presence of Jesus in eucharistic adoration?

PAT GOHN

JANUARY 7

New Resolutions

The way you live your days is the way you live
your life.

Annie Dillard

The Ignatian practice of “examen” is a kind of daily review of the day. It gives us an opportunity to step back and examine the various moments, to rejoice in our strengths and humbly acknowledge the weaker areas in need of improvement.

In and out of the confessional, it’s important to live each day intentionally, to examine our consciences, to resolve to resist temptation, and to thank God for the graces he sends to help us. It’s important to take time to think about our own personal and spiritual goals, to ask, “What goals does God have for me?” As you begin a new year, take time to humbly examine the following areas in your life:

- How can I deepen my prayer life?
- How can I make more time for silent prayer with God?
- What small acts of kindness can I do for my family and spouse?
- Do I make enough time for simple fun and relaxation as a family and for myself?
- What do I need to detach from or do less of?
- What can I do more of?
- What hinders me from serving my family as best as I can?
- How can I love my spouse more?

- How can I help my spouse love me more?
- What helps life flow more smoothly for myself and my family?

Lord, lead me and weave me into how you envision me. Grant me the grace to refocus on you as my ultimate resolution and goal.

To Ponder: What do you believe God is asking of you, in this current stage and situation in your life? What plans might he have for your future?

ERIKA MARIE

JANUARY 8

Doing Something More

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere
in prayer.

Romans 12:12

Every year I create a long, daunting list of ways I want to improve my life, grow in virtue, and get rid of something—it might be weight, clutter, or bad habits. One year when I looked at my list, I resolved to take a different approach.

I took my list to my spiritual director and asked him, “What should I focus on first, Father?”

“Focus on God and your relationship with him,” he responded.

And so, I resolved to begin each day with a simple morning offering—giving everything to God before it even happened, uniting my crosses to the cross of Christ, and asking

God for his grace and strength rather than relying on my own. Father said it should only take five minutes, and I was shocked by the simplicity of it. That's it? What about the rest of my list? Father told me it could wait.

In the grand scheme of resolutions, mine did not seem like much. But my simple offering to God made all the difference. Almost immediately, I noticed a change in my mind and heart. My attitude improved, and I felt more joyful, even in the midst of chaotic and frustrating situations. And, in time, the other things on my list started falling into place. By offering everything to God first, it became clear what to do next.

Thank you, Father, for hearing my prayer, accepting my simple offering, and responding in love according to your holy will.

To Ponder: At the beginning of this new year, what is one resolution you can make that focuses on your relationship with God?

SARAH DAMM

JANUARY 9

Encourage One Another

God gives power to the faint, and strengthens
the powerless.

Isaiah 40:29

It's the same thing every year: I put "exercise" on my resolutions list . . . and run out of energy after the first week. Whenever my kids see "exercise" on my to-do list, they always put little comments in the margins, such as, "You can do