

Lk 2:16-21

Happy New Year! Hopefully, this is not just a greeting. For us, Christians, let this also be a prayer – that God may grant us a peaceful and fruitful new year. Let me, then, begin with a blessing using the ancient formula mentioned in the first reading: “The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!” (Num 6:24-26).

As we enter the New Year, we look back at the past year. We humbly acknowledge God’s abundant graces bestowed on us, despite our unworthiness. And so, we come together to thank and praise Him for His loving providence and protection.

Yet, looking back, we also admit that we had our failures and shortcomings, we have not fulfilled our New Year’s resolutions. And so, we bow our heads in humble sorrow, asking God’s forgiveness and mercy.

And so, this New Year, once again we make some resolutions. This is what we do at the beginning of every year. There are two main reasons why we have failed to accomplish most of our resolutions. First, it is because most of them are not resolutions but are actually mere wishes.

There is a vast difference between a wish and a resolution. When there is no concrete course of action, it is just a wish, and not a resolution. And nothing will come out of it. In our New Year’s resolutions, we must be ready to take action and be willing to sacrifice.

2nd, we have not been able to accomplish our resolutions because perhaps we did not pray enough and, instead, relied solely on our own human powers. As Psalm 127 puts it, “Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build. Unless the Lord guard the city, in vain does the guard keep watch.”

Ultimately, it is God alone who can bring to fruition all our efforts and endeavors. It is important, therefore, that our resolutions are fully grounded on faith in God. Then He will help us fulfill them according to His plan. “Do your best and God will do the rest.”

We need to acknowledge the truth that absolute power resides in God alone. And so, the most powerful man is not he who has lots of money, or who wields political power, or who has weapons of mass destruction. Rather, it is the one who bends his knees and prays to God.

On the first day of the New Year, we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God. This gives us the opportunity to reflect on the example of the Woman who has shown us how to make and fulfill a firm lifetime resolution. At the Annunciation, in response to the Archangel Gabriel’s announcement, she made her vow: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Coming from the mouth of a humble maiden of Nazareth, these words may sound so ordinary and even insignificant. But in reality, as proven by her perfect fidelity and obedience to God all throughout her earthly life, these words were, we may say, her “Vision Statement”.

It was a very simple statement, but so profound and powerful. “I am the handmaid of the Lord”: a firm commitment to humility. “May it be done to me according to your word”: a concrete resolution to a total and unconditional obedience to the will of God. With such spirit of perfect humility and complete obedience, Mary made herself truly pleasing to God and ready to fulfill her unique and most sublime role as the Theotokos, Mother of God.

Each one of us have our own New Year’s resolutions. Let us entrust all these to Jesus through his Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Knowing how limited we are, we turn to our Blessed Mother so that she may present all our prayers and resolutions to her Son, Jesus. Then, we are confident that the Lord will look upon us with love and bless our New Year with all the graces we need to face the challenges and trials ahead.

Let us begin the New Year with the thought of our Lord Jesus imparting his gracious blessing upon us. The blessing hands of Christ are like a roof that protects us. But at the same time, they are a gesture of opening up, tearing the world open so that heaven may enter in, may become ‘present’ within it.

May our Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother God, keep us and protect us in the mantle of her motherly love.

May we all have a peaceful and blessed New Year!

Fr Oscar Paraiso