

ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

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The Host Apostolate

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A NEW YEAR...

Blessings to All throughout this year!

This may be a difficult year for many with financial restraints, job loses, maybe more upheaval in nature and of course our own personal challenges. We as Christians are called to be people of Faith and Hope. Are we spiritually prepared to meet these difficulties with courage.

As we greet the New Year, still with the Joy of Christmastide in our hearts, we may be making some New Year resolutions.

Most of our resolutions diminish with time and like the grass wither and fade. Most of these concern do's and don'ts in our lives, and attempt to improve our lives and situations.

However, do we consider changes that will be of deeper value and will last, such as prayer or making use of the sacraments?

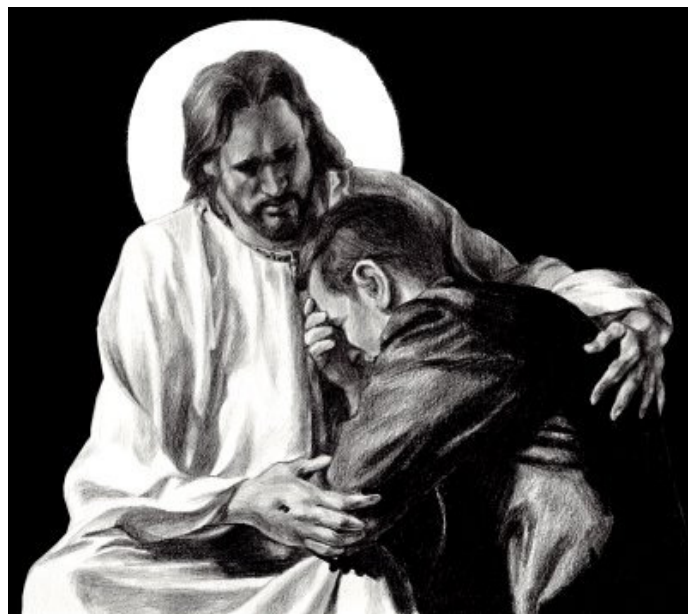
One way to make changes is to make great use of the Sacrament of Confession, Reconciliation, which is a profession of faith. This allows us to shed that which prevents us from living fully a life filled with grace. When we recognise who we are before God, how much we are loved and have to love back. We grow not only in faith but in holiness and in a very real way improve our situations by seeing things through the eyes of a Loving God.

Let us consider this great sacrament and its use.

There are many reasons why people do not go to Confession including, on the one hand, extreme fear and negligence, and on the other, a mistaken belief that they are sinless. We have also allowed a view that as God forgives everything anyway there is no need for us to make any recompense for His love or acknowledge our

errors. Added to this we have removed the very notion of 'sacrifice' that is so integral to having been bought and redeemed at amazing cost by a God who indeed is Love but PERFECT love not the human variety.

Now, deep in our contemporary Catholic psyche, we have bought into nearly all of this. Indeed we believe that in the past we were far too harsh and so we seem to be unable to address the basic flaws in humanity that lead us to sin in the first place and why we are Baptised (removing Original Sin) and why we need to grow through the means of bringing to the fore all our sins, faults, failings, mistaken views, lack of forgiveness of others, illusions of self and be humble enough to confess them. The notion that



all can be explained by psychology has also had its effect. Therefore, we explain everything by comments such as... well that is just me, as I am, it's not my fault, everything has made me like this, etc. so completely removing freedom of choice and the wonderful gift of free will given by a God who not only loves us but respects us and gives us choices. We are not just conditioned by fate, we choose to do wrong and can choose to be holy.

All this requires us to make a shift from self to God and to others.

I do not know when we forgot to love God. It seems that we prefer to think of love as a one way process. Yet we have Jesus' own word that the greatest Commandment is to the love of God and the love of our neighbour (Matt 22:37-39) This is a 'not only but also statement'. Could we not in this new year make a resolution to try to live that way?

We must never forget that Reconciliation with anyone, let alone our Creator, is an incredible gift that frees us. No greater treasure exists, than to know that we have been forgiven by God and that we can receive Him worthily in Holy Communion, this side of Heaven. Yet we ignore the gift and belittle the instrument.

Eucharistic Congresses: How they began

It was Marie Tamisie (1834-1910) in Touraine, France, who first thought of the idea of Eucharistic Congresses. In 1873 at Paray-le Monail she saw 60 members of the French parliament kneel in the chapel to pledge to work for a more Christian influence on the Government. That moment suggested to Marie that greater things were possible. She began by encouraging pilgrimages of devotion to the Eucharist. In 1881, 800 gathered in the University of Lille for the first international Eucharistic Congress. Now numbers are counted not in the hundreds but in hundreds of thousands. At first held only in Europe these congresses have spanned the globe.

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Must we not also remember that we must give our Priests, who stand in the place of Jesus, an opportunity to serve and become Holy themselves. They have the gift of Keys, the forgiveness of sins. Have we not examples of saintly priests who dedicated their lives to this sacrament like St. Jean Vianney and St. Pio and Bl. Leopold Mandic.

So, a resolution for the new year?... to use this Sacrament, open the box of love, and be blessed by it?

Let us pray for each other that his may be so...

Halina Holman

YEAR OF FAITH

Pope Benedict XVI announced a special Year of Faith to help Catholics appreciate the gift of faith, deepen their relationship with God and strengthen their commitment to sharing faith with others. This starts later this year.

"What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end," he wrote.

Faith helps people recognise the face of Christ in those who are suffering, and "it is his love that impels us to assist him whenever he becomes our neighbour along the journey of life."

The word Martyr means witness. It is never easy to witness because we put ourselves on the line, but there are many ways to witness. We are called to bear witness to the Light, the Light of the World Jesus Christ. Jesus showed us many ways to do this, some require big ways but many are found in the very ordinary, the essential ways of living. St. Francis said we must always proclaim the Gospel... using words if we have to. St. Catherine of Sienna said that if we were what we should be we would set the world ablaze. It is amazing what an act of kindness can do, or a prayer for someone, or a little listening.