

# A new year, a fresh start

What is it about the turnover of a new year that makes us think we need to make resolutions to change? There is nothing magical about Jan. 1. Wouldn't it be better, perhaps, to resolve to change at the beginning of spring when a lot of new growth is happening in the world?

But most of us do it when the calendar turns the page. We decide that this year will be the year we make amends, lose that excess weight, exercise more.

A lot of the typical resolutions have more to do with our exterior than our interior. I'd like to suggest a few resolutions that might improve your spirit and your mind.

1. Be kinder to others. I grew up in the Midwest, so I typically say hello to people – in elevators, on the street, in a store. My wife occasionally tells me it's obvious I didn't grow up around here, since that's a rarity (I guess especially in elevators). But saying hello is a simple courtesy that could go a long way in brightening someone's day, and you might find you like it.

2. Assume the best in people. Especially after a good Samaritan was killed after trying to help a panhandler in East Baltimore, it may seem difficult to always look at certain people in a good light. Often when a homeless person approaches us, it's hard to look past the disheveled clothes to see the person within. I usually try to carry a restaurant gift card to give to a panhandler if he or she is looking for something to eat. If I give a person money and they use it for cigarettes or alcohol, that's his or her choice. But if I want to ensure they get a meal, a gift card – with enough to get a sandwich and maybe something to drink – might be better. More so, if you don't acknowledge the humanity and dignity of the person asking for help, you can't see the face of Jesus in him or her – and you can't be the hands of Jesus either.

3. Read more. We're all so focused on our smart devices – social media and games can be very distracting. Reading a book (OK, even a book on a cellphone app) might be a more effective use of time, even if you have to use the phone. But an honest-to-goodness, physical book gives you a sense of completion as you turn page after page and eventually get to the end. You close the book; mission accomplished. Now pick a

new one. Perhaps challenge yourself to read 52 books in 2019 – a book a week (on average). Include books on spiritual life or the saints.

4. Pray more. What kind of prayer serves you best? Spiritual reading, centering prayer, the rosary, the Divine Mercy chaplet? Catholic Review Media provides a great vehicle to enhance your faith every day. The MyParish app (search for it on iOS and Android) includes the daily readings and a whole host of Catholic prayers. It also connects you with your local parish for updates on events, such as Bible study or enrichment classes, as well as Mass and confession times. It's even got a built-in examination of conscience. OK, so yes, it's another reason to use your cellphone, but it's better for your soul than Candy Crush.

Maybe there is something magical about Jan. 1. It's the octave of Christmas, the feast of Mary and the World Day of Prayer for Peace. I guess that's as good a time as any to start some things afresh.