

Say 'yes' to God's plan

On New Year's Eve when I was a child, my parents always pushed the hands of the cuckoo clock forward a few hours, handed out musical instruments, and we paraded noisily around the house. I'm sure the neighbors on either side of our rowhome were happy we didn't wait until midnight for our party.

Then we'd fall into bed and get up the next morning to go to Mass for the holy day. As a child, I'm not sure how much I appreciated going to Mass on a weekday, but as an adult, I love that we begin the New Year by marking the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God.

As we look at the New Year ahead of us, it's impossible to know what opportunities and challenges we will encounter during the next 365 days. There will be laughter and joy. There will be difficulty and loss. There will be hellos and farewells. We have no choice but to say yes to all of it, even the unknowns. And who better to serve as our inspiration for that "yes" than our Blessed Mother.

When Mary said yes, she knew the joy and sorrow in her future. We do not have the benefit and the burden of knowing. No heaven-sent archangel appears before us to outline our future and ask whether we will accept God's plan for this chapter of our lives. But every morning we have the opportunity to say yes to God yet again and accept his will as our own. And Mary reminds us that by saying yes to God, we accept the good and the bad - willingly, wholeheartedly and with love.

Mary also offers love and support and a chance for us to connect more deeply with her Son through our relationship with her. Just look at her at the wedding feast at Cana, when, with quiet strength, she approaches her Son to tell him there is no more wine. If Mary can ask Jesus to address something that mundane, then she can certainly intercede for us in any matter, large or small, weighing on our minds and hearts.

That's Mary. She gets us. She hears us. She loves us. And she knows what our Lord asks of us. She knows it may be daunting. But she also knows we each have what we need to achieve the work God sets out for us on earth.

So as the New Year begins, we might wake up and think, "What now? I answered your call, God. I did what you asked me to do." But we never get to stop listening for that next step. We never get to say we have completed our work on this earth until, of course, God takes us home.

On that journey, how wonderful to know that not only can we turn to our Blessed Mother for comfort and inspiration and reassurance, but we can even call on her as Mother Teresa did, "Mary, Mother of God, please be a mother to me now."

That simple prayer is like when my children yell, "Mom!" Sometimes it's because they're hungry or stuck behind the couch or arguing over a toy. But sometimes they don't know what they need. They just know they want me. Prayer can be like that. It's comforting to know that no matter what the New Year brings, I can go running to Mary. To feel comforted and loved, we don't need to have the right words - or any at all. We just need to ask for help.

"I know not what the future holds," goes the line, "but I know who holds the future." And we do.

This year, as that ball falls in Times Square, the fireworks go off, we pop the champagne cork or bang on tambourines during a pseudo-midnight parade, we might call out, "Happy New Year!" But inside, deep down, maybe we'll also quietly say yes to whatever our Father in heaven has in mind for us to accomplish for him in this New Year.