

## “PROMISES YET UNBROKEN” RESOLUTIONS AND THE ORDERED LIFE

I still chuckle when recalling a brief unit I taught to my 8<sup>th</sup> grade religion students twenty years ago. Its aim was to help them understand the monastic life, and it even included an exercise in contemplative prayer (complete with incense), silently processing to the school chapel— it was well received. But there is always one student in every class! One lad, struggling to understand the **monastic horarium**, (Latin for “of/related to the hours,” i.e. the daily schedule), asked— “Why do they get up so early when they have nothing to do all day except pray?” Mildly sarcastic or not, such questions force us to think. I’m not sure I had the best answer twenty years ago, so I’d like to give it another shot. For me it all revolves around striving to live an ordered life. And therein lies a crucial lesson for spiritual success. When our lives are disordered, they quickly unravel, and this can only be overcome by a resolute desire to change, not only now, but for the long haul. Enter the annual New Year’s Resolution.

Get ready for the specials to appear at your neighborhood health and fitness club— it’s that time of year. Resolutions are a dime a dozen, the only question being how long they will last. Reputable polls show that approximately 40-50% of Americans make New Year’s resolutions. Why are they important? For one thing, new beginnings form a key way for us to mark progress towards our goals, a fresh starting point from which we can be assured that, at least for now, all is well. So, if I am able to exercise regularly for the first few weeks of a new year, by the end of January I will likely be feeling much better. It matters much less how I fared in the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas vis-à-vis my diet, because I am already doing better in 2017. So the thinking goes.

But there is more to it than that. Being a goal-oriented person is spiritually healthy as well. Years ago, a wise priest college professor said in our “Christian Mysticism” class: “In the spiritual life, you are either moving closer to God or going backwards. The one thing you cannot do is stay the same.” Really? That made no sense to me. “Why not,” I thought? The answer is easier to understand with every passing year. Remaining stagnant means that we are not improving, plain and simple. Even the stock market agrees with my theology professor. Because stocks are priced based on their future earnings potential, flat sales for a company will not result in the price staying the same because investors are interested in companies making **more** money, not the same amount. Stocks will fall. We must keep moving forward.

A disciplined life is an ordered life, and an ordered life is actually quite freeing. Our days are ordered, that is, directed towards some good, towards some goal. And that goal is the Lord. The first Eucharistic Prayer reads in part: “Therefore, Lord, we pray: graciously accept this oblation of our service, and that of your whole family; order our days in your peace...” The last phrase has always caught my eye. What does this mean? Notice that it is God who does the ordering; He orders our days in his peace. To be under God’s good order means to be subject to His law, not a constricting law, but a law designed to bring us happiness. Think of it as being on God’s team, part of His crew, under His protective care. Today is the first day of 2017 A.D., **Anno Domini**. It is the Lord’s Year, not ours. It belongs to Him and we are invited to be part of His team. These days, football fans are rooting for their favorite teams as the season draws to a close. We too are happiest when we are “on track,” when we are “firing on all cylinders,” making progress and not becoming sidetracked. But that takes discipline, and I’d like to suggest one resolution for 2017.

Get up **30 minutes earlier** each morning, adjusting your bedtime if necessary. The morning is the best time of day. There is an old saying, “Nothing good happens after midnight.” I could not agree more— in fact, as I get older, that Midnight has become 10:00 p.m. Lest you think I am thoroughly boring, I’ll admit of two *possible* exceptions to the rule: staying up on New Year’s Eve to watch the ball drop in Times Square and attending Midnight Mass. But I am quick to remind people that technically speaking, the Roman Missal indicates “Mass at Night,” (*Missa in nocte*) not Midnight Mass! An ordered life is a purposeful life. We get things done because there is a built in motivation to repeat good practices that result in good outcomes.

During a 2007 visit to **Heiligenkreuz Abbey in Austria**, Pope Benedict XVI gave a beautiful reflection on the monastic vocation: “A monastery, in which the community gathers several times a day for the praise of

God, testifies to the fact that this primordial human longing does not go unfulfilled: God the Creator has not placed us in a fearful darkness where, groping our way in despair, we seek some ultimate meaning (cf. Acts 17:27); God has not abandoned us in a desert void, bereft of meaning, where in the end only death awaits us. No! God has shone forth in our darkness with his light, with his Son Jesus Christ.” The highly ordered life in a monastery may not be our vocation, but aspects of their daily life can serve as inspiration that will truly benefit our spiritual lives.

- Shopping, papal style. Shortly before Christmas, Pope Francis made a surprise visit to a shoe store near the Vatican. While I suspect the owner would have been delighted to bring over any number of samples to the papal residence, perhaps the Holy Father just wanted to get out and browse and take in the scene on a Roman street before Christmas. Good for him! The shoe store is across the street from a fine restaurant named *Osteria dei Pontefici*, “Tavern of the Popes.”
- Due to an early bulletin deadline, by the time you read this, the Gophers Holiday Bowl contest against Washington State will have already occurred and the University may even be searching for a new head coach. Time will tell, but this scandal will not disappear overnight— not by a longshot.
- The Crashed Ice Skating Championships will be returning to the area for at least one more year. The race is scheduled for the first weekend in February. I have diligently tried to minimize the impact of the event as much as possible. Last year, people described it being easier to access the Cathedral for Masses, etc. I do not pretend that there are no inconveniences, but the diligence of the workers has really impressed me (they shovel and volunteer to help take down the outdoor crèche), and the friendliness of the folks from Red Bull is unmistakable. Thanks for your understanding.
- A rotting **1962 Aston Martin DB4** that spent fifty years in someone’s backyard is valued between \$375,000-\$475,000. Fully restored, it could sell for \$2.5 million. James Bond fans understand why! But when I scour our property here, all I find are more rabbits!
- The recent death of **Cindy Stowell**, contestant and champion from the wildly popular game show **Jeopardy**, has a silver lining. She amassed over \$100,000 in winnings, but died before the show aired. Her family is donating her winnings to cancer research in her honor. She knew her situation was terminal, but garnished the strength to compete and to win! *Requiescat in pace.*

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector