

# JANUARY 1, 2023: MARY, MOTHER OF GOD



As we begin the New Year, it is normal for people to make resolutions for desired changes in their life style. Probably most resolutions deal with people's health. They will plan on losing weight, eating better, and/or exercising more. Such desires to change bad habits concerning one's health are, of course, laudable and to be encouraged. All of us need to treat our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, and one way we do that is through proper diet and exercise.

At this time of year I believe that another aspect of our lives could also use some necessary adjustments. As Catholics we can take our spiritual life, in a sense, for granted, and yet, like all other aspects of our lives it needs an overhaul from time to time. I would like to throw out a challenge to you: that your resolutions this year be about making necessary changes to how you are living out and growing in your relationship with God. And I would like to suggest the following ways to do just that.

The first challenge is to actually give dedicated time to prayer. I often hear from people that they are too busy to pray and that God will understand. The problem with this thinking is that prayer is not something that we do for God. Prayer is God's gift to us. Basically, when we choose *not* to pray we are turning down God's gift. Furthermore, as Christians our lives are intended to be centered in Christ and dedicated to serving God's will. If we do not take time to speak with the Lord, how can we accomplish either goal? Quite frankly, it is impossible to do. We must remember that prayer never, ever, begins with us. Prayer is always a dialogue that God begins, and so when we refuse to pray we are refusing to respond to God who is already speaking to us. Shouldn't we consider that rude on our part? The challenge then is this: since God gives us 1440 minutes every day, give back to Him 15 minutes every day for a month. That is about 1% of your day. How can we *not* find 15 minutes in our day to respond to our God who speaking to us.

The second challenge is to read scripture every day. Saint Jerome wrote that "Ignorance of scriptures is ignorance of Christ." We cannot really know Christ if we do not take the time to hear what He taught. I often hear people say erroneous things about what Jesus taught and I want to respond, have you ever read the Gospels? The picture they paint of Christ is in no way related to his teachings. How can we center our life in Christ if we do not take time to understand what He taught? How can we claim faith in Christ if we do not give Him room to speak to us about how He wants us to live out our vocation in life? The challenge is to pick one of the Gospels and just start reading through it from beginning to end. Each day, just take a few minutes to read over one of the stories and listen to what it is trying to tell you. Or, you can make use of the podcast by Fr. Mike Schmitz—Bible in a Year.

The third challenge is to make use of the great gift of the sacrament of Penance. I often hear people tell me, "I don't need to go to confession." We might believe that, but I do not believe that God would agree with us. We must remember that Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance and gave it to us as a means of growing in a life of conversion, to be more deeply dedicated to Him. If Christ gave us this sacrament He did it for a reason. Basically if we are refusing to make use of this gift, we are telling Christ He was wrong. I don't know about you, but telling Jesus that He is wrong tends to make me feel uncomfortable. Even if we do not have serious sin on our conscience, this sacrament can be seen as working like an oil change. We need to change the oil in our car because the oil begins to break down and over time crude sediments can get in the engine. Changing the oil helps to flush it all out. That is what the sacrament of Penance does for us. It flushes out all of the detritus that builds up in our lives and lets us start afresh. At least once a month I receive the sacrament of Penance to help me keep my life straight with Christ. I have found that, by humbling myself and being open to God's grace, this sacrament has changed me as a person. It has opened me to be more honest with myself in terms of my relationship with God, others, and self. The big challenge this coming year is to humble ourselves and make more frequent use of this great gift from Christ, which can only benefit us—by helping us deepen our relationship with Christ. If our regular times for confession do not work for you, just contact me and I will be happy to set up another time to celebrate the sacrament.

Finally, I leave you with this prayer from Saint Ignatius which is at the heart of all I just wrote:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding  
and my entire will,  
All I have and call my own.

You have given it all to me.  
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.  
Give me only your love and your grace.  
That is enough for me.

I pray that you have a truly Blessed New Year.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at [fr.brian@theholyrood.org](mailto:fr.brian@theholyrood.org) , or if easier please call or text me at (978) 254-0560.  
Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian".

Fr. Brian