

January 2021 Pastoral Message

“Rejoice^d in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 4: 4-7

Happy New Year, beloved!

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father, and Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I was recently reading a post that a colleague of mine put up on social media. She asked for recommendations about what to write for her personal journal for the new year. I bit my lip and thought about it and then came up with something – new directions. I sent her the message and then went on my way with the rest of the posts. I don't know if she took the idea, but my epiphany has been with me for the last few days. New directions.

As we enter into a new year, and change over our calendars, it is time again for new beginnings. Yes, this may seem cliché, but as we leave 2020 behind us in the rear-view mirror, we look forward to what 2021 may bring us. Some of us sometime use the new year to start a new project or get on a health kick, try a new diet, or change up the way we go about our lives and vocations. New beginnings indeed.

Last year was tough. It was difficult. We had to go about life a bit different. We learned how to adapt to the new medical and social landscape brought on by the Covid-19 virus. Businesses closed, schools changed direction, and food service pretty much came to a screeching halt. We enter into January and many of the changes from last year are still in effect; we have come to a place where the new normal has made an imprint in our day to day and we are getting used to it. However, we also look to the light at the end of this tunnel and we suddenly see it a bit brighter. New cases of the virus are down, businesses are slowly being relaxed to allow for more people to patronize them, and going outside of the house or apartment is not as much of a daunting task as it once was.

I want you to heed these words though...God has not left the building. God is here. And God will continue to be in our lives. I know that some of us feel we have been tested by God and ask, “how can this be?” But in my heart of hearts, I cannot believe that a loving and benevolent God, who gave us Jesus Christ, made this virus to test humanity. I believe that God, even through all of this toil and tumult, is still there and wants us to love Him and do the same with our family and neighbors...through facemasks and distancing and all. As the scripture says, “The Lord is near,” and wants to be in your life.

We continue to worship virtually in our parish, but I see that changing in the near future. As the numbers of the virus decrease, I perceive that there will be more relaxation of the social

gathering restrictions introduced and that means we may be able to get back into our respective sanctuaries and resume church related activities. This of course will not happen overnight, but the process will lead us in this direction. We will come together again.

But God is still with us, even now. I encourage you, my beloved family, and friends, to look toward to the triune God in your lives and follow the path that Christ gave us. Remember that you are a loved and are a named child of God, that you are forgiven your sins, that you have been given the gift of mercy and salvation, and that eternal life is in front of you. Remember that Christ came to you as a model of the godly life and that we are to share in this good news with our neighbors, whoever they are, and wherever they may be. God is love, and God is there, right beside you. God has not left the building.

Consider my words as a new beginning, of sorts. A new beginning in that we start off the new year by reflecting on our own spiritual practices. Ask yourself if you are missing something, or need to be enriched somewhere else. Personally, I know I need to redirect my devotional life back on track, and a new year is a great place to start. Maybe you need that push too?

This is a time for new beginnings and today is the best place to start. As the scripture reminds us, "Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Pray on what you will do for the new year. Meditate on how you want to thank God for the gifts given you. And think about how to channel those thoughts into daily practices in your own lives. The Lord is near and will continue to be there...always.

Bless you all and again, Happy New Year! I look forward to seeing you all again soon.

In Christ,

Rev. Erik Karlson

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