

Landry: How to make spiritual New Year's resolutions



In the last week of any year, it's a long-standing tradition to write about New Year's resolutions. Some write about the sorts of resolutions people might choose to undertake, the most popular resolutions consistently have something to do with personal health (exercising more, eating better) or being more responsible money.

Others write about the futility of the resolutions themselves: a quick Google search told me that somewhere between 75 to 92 per cent of New Year's Resolutions fail, and that the most common day these are abandoned is Jan. 12 each year. With numbers like that, you might wonder why I'm bothering to write about resolutions again.

The thing is that as Catholic Christians, we shouldn't be so quick to abandon our resolutions. When we get to confession, we are asked to pray an Act of Contrition before we receive absolution. The prayer I was taught includes the words *"I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin."*

This resolution is not the sort of thing we should just cast aside like a gym membership or the guitar I've given up on learning how to play. Although I sin again (and again and again), I come back to confession with this resolution sincerely on my heart in hopes of making some spiritual progress. You might say that, as Catholics, we should be in the business of making resolutions (and renewing them once we've fallen short.) And so, while this is certainly not an

exhaustive list, I'd like to propose three areas to consider as spiritual New Year's Resolutions:

A Habit of Prayer

When it comes to prayer, the best advice may come in the slogan Nike has used in promotions for years: "Just do it." And though it sounds simple, many of us struggle to maintain a consistent habit of prayer. In response to a student question on prayer last year, Rev. Paul Moret – the pastor of Holy Trinity parish in Spruce Grove – explained that what is most important is that you make a commitment to do something simple, something you can commit to, and something you'll follow through with. This may mean beginning each morning with an Our Father, and keeping to that for weeks or even months. If you'd like to expand your habit do so in small increments: perhaps you make it an Our Father and a Hail Mary, or a decade of the Rosary, or something along these lines. Keep it simple, and make it something you actually do.

For those looking to dive deeper into prayer, our faith offers a treasury of spiritual classics written to help us deepen our life of prayer. For beginners, Anthony Bloom's *Beginning to Pray* and St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* are both good places to start, while the works of St. Teresa of Avila or St. John of the Cross alongside the care of a good spiritual director might be a good place for someone to deepen their prayer.

Read Scripture

St. Jerome once said "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ" – in other words, we *need* to spend more time reading Scripture. And so, a decision to read the Bible is probably one of the more popular Christian New Year's resolutions. If you search a Catholic Bible-in-a-year reading plan, you'll most likely come across this excellent post from Brandon Vogt outlining resources to help you read or the upcoming Bible in a Year podcast with Rev. Mike Schmitz.

The thing is, when it comes to reading scripture, in my experience Father Paul's advice about prayer also applies here. I think it's important to take on something simple that you can actually commit to. With more than 1,300 chapters in the Bible, you could technically read the Bible in a year if you're reading about four chapters per day. It may be more valuable to take your time, and instead read one chapter per day (even if this means you take four years to get it done!) If you want to do something along those lines, my *Unfolding Scripture Bible Study* might be of help. This study, based on Jeff Cavins' *Great Adventure Bible Timeline*, will help you read your way through the story of salvation which in turn helps the rest of Scripture make more sense.

A New Spiritual Discipline

Alongside prayer and reading the Bible, there's also room for most of us to take on some other spiritual discipline. What might that look like? Well, if you look to the Precepts of the Church, you find a good starting point for what

is expected of us as ordinary Catholics – and it should come as no surprise that the Eucharist and Confession are high on this list. Beyond those, here are a few spiritual habits you that might take on in the coming year.

One idea would be to find a way to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament each week (between Sundays). If you are unable or don't feel comfortable to actually go into your parish church, sit in your car in the church parking lot and spend a quiet moment with Christ.

Another idea would be to take on the habit of daily praying the Rosary or the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Finally, you might take on a habit of spiritual reading – of reading books and articles that will help us to grow in holiness. It's hard to go wrong with the Lives of the Saints, and a personal favourite for me will be *Story of a Soul* – the autobiography of St. Therese de Lisieux. If you want to dive in a little further, last May Cardinal Thomas Collins, the Archbishop of Toronto, shared a list of books he recommends all Catholics read in order to better know our own faith.

As you look to the beginning of 2021, recognize that there is an opportunity to make a resolution to pray more, to read more Scripture, or to take on some other spiritual discipline. And if you have to renew these resolutions a hundred times in the coming year: so be it. In mid-March, Bishop Robert Barron spoke of the spiritual opportunities that the pandemic offers to each of us. He saw great value in the fact that at the time so many of our distractions were being taken from us and so each of us now has the chance to “sit alone in a room by (ourselves), and wrestle with the really deep questions.” I pray your resolutions will help you to do just that.

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