

Landry: Resolve to live a more active faith life as the new school year starts

The celebration of Jan. 1 brings with it the practise of making New Year's resolutions.

People often resolve to make a fresh start when it comes to things like physical health (exercising more or eating better) or spiritual disciplines (increasing prayer, overcoming a vice, or reading their way through Scripture).

I often wonder if we'd be more successful at these resolutions if we made them in September. The ebb and flow of life often means that in September we are establishing (or re-establishing) routines and habits that surround work, school, and even parish life.

So given that we are a few days away from our calendar turning over to September, I want to suggest a few things we could incorporate into our spiritual lives during this season of new beginnings. And since this column is titled "life in third place" – I'm going to emphasize what it might mean to be more third in the coming year.

The 'T' in third means to Trust in God's love for you. Earlier in the summer, I compared the trust that Harry Colcord had in Charles Blondin as they crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope to the way we should learn to trust God.

As was the case for Colcord and Blondin, trusting anyone hinges on the depth of their shared relationship. Hopefully, most of us know which friends are the ones we ought to lean on in our most desperate moments – those with whom we have built friendships over time and through a variety of struggles.

If we're to apply this sort of trust to God, it is necessary that we build that relationship of trust over time – and especially through trials. The simplest way to achieve this is by prayer: consider making an increased commitment to prayer. If you don't pray, resolve to carve out five or 10 minutes a day for prayer (talking and listening).

If you've got a habit that includes 10 or 15 minutes of daily prayer already, perhaps consider adding the Rosary or a weekly Holy Hour to your spiritual disciplines. As you do this, your understanding of God's love for you will grow and so too will your ability to trust Him... especially in those moments when you most need to do so.

The 'H' is for Humility. Often when we think of humility, we assume it's a discipline by which you should figuratively beat yourself up and put yourself

down (I am so lowly, so terrible). This is not what we mean by humility. Jesus calls us to humility when He says “blessed are the poor in spirit” (*Matthew 5:3*), and true humility is about recognizing things as they truly are.

One of the most profound realities we can come to understand is that this universe has only one God, and it isn't me. St. Teresa of Kolkata kept a list of ways to cultivate humility among her sisters, and any of these would be a good way to practise a resolution to be more poor in spirit.

The 'I' is for Integrity. As a parent, I am often reminded of my responsibility here as there are smaller people watching my every word and action. They will imitate the ways in which I am honest (or not) in my dealings with others, how I handle my temper, and even how I interact with the screen on my phone. It is a challenge to be mindful here of my external actions, but integrity goes even further.

Jesus gives haunting words on our need to have integrity (*Luke 12:2-3*):

“Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.”

You can consider a call to integrity in two spheres. The first is whether your words and actions on Sunday mornings at Church match up to your words and actions in your workplace, or when you're out on a Saturday night. The second is perhaps more difficult: when no one is watching, what do we choose to think, to say, and to do?

The 'R' is to Read – and here, I mean that you should read Scripture. St. Jerome says that the ignorance of Scripture is the ignorance of Christ. While a book like the Lord of the Rings is an exciting book, we don't refer to it as the “inspired Word of God.” We need to fall in love with the Bible because this book tells us of a God who is madly, head over heels in love with us.

Over the past few years in the Archdiocese of Edmonton, we've been challenged to spend more time reading Scripture. There's a little more than 1,300 chapters in the Bible. You could read the whole thing in a year if you read four chapters a day (or read one chapter a day and you'll finish the task in four years). And once you start reading and asking questions about what it is that God's Word is really saying, you just might find yourself wanting to read it (and pray your way through it) all over again.

Finally, the 'D' means to do the Duty of the moment. Catherine Doherty – founder of the Madonna House Apostolate – says that “the duty of the moment is what you should be doing at any given time, in whatever place God has put you...your duty of the moment may be to scrub your floors. Do you scrub your floors well? With great love for God? If not, do so. If you see to it that your house is well-swept, your food is on the table, and there is peace during

meals, then there is a slow order that is established, and the immense tranquillity of God's order falls upon you and your family, all of you together. You're doing the duty of the moment, your living the nitty-gritty, daily routine of ordinary life, can uncover the face of Christ ..." And Catherine is echoing saints like Teresa of Kolkata who challenged us to "do small things with great love". What it all has in common is an uncommon embracing of whatever task in front of you: doing the dishes, mowing the lawn, playing with your kids, going to work, reading to a toddler ... often our greatest sign of holiness is found in these little things.

For the coming year, take a look at opportunities to do a better job of being third. Deepen your life of prayer and learn what it means trust in God's love for you. Be humble. Show integrity. Read the Bible. Do the Duty of the moment. Consider these as five suggestions that might serve you as "New Year's resolutions" as September rolls around.

– Mike Landry is chaplain to Evergreen Catholic Schools west of Edmonton, and serves as an occasional guest speaker & music minister in communities across Western Canada. Mike and his wife Jennifer live in Stony Plain, Alta. with their five children.