



Family Spirituality Newsletter January 2012

As I was contemplating what to write about for this issue – I came across this blessing for the New Year and thought it was perfect. Happy 2012!

As we celebrate the epiphany this month, we wish you and all of yours the grace of the new year!

May it be fresh like the newly fallen snow.

May it be laced with the wisdom of the years that precede it.

May it be filled with moments where you are present to what is,
where you love what is,

where you grow to the next moment because of what is before you.

May your new year be filled with epiphanies of love that never could have been before now,
and that will never be again in quite the same way here after.

May your light shine bright in the world,
akin to the glow of Christ's birth.

May you celebrate your blessings.

Apostleship of Prayer: Intentions for the Month of January

Take a moment during the month of January to join Pope Benedict and Catholics throughout the world, praying for these special intentions:

- **Victims of Natural Disasters.** That the victims of natural disasters may receive the spiritual and material comfort they need to rebuild their lives.
- **Dedication to Peace.** That the dedication of Christians to peace may bear witness to the name of Christ before all men and women of good will

Women from Scripture and History: Elizabeth

Elizabeth holds two important distinctions that lend immortality to her name. She was the mother of John the Baptist, and she was the first to greet her cousin Mary, as mother of the Messiah. The evangelist Luke used Elizabeth's story to mirror the events surrounding the birth of Jesus - both stories have an Annunciation by the angel Gabriel and songs that praise God's goodness.

Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Elizabeth and her husband had dearly longed for a child. They had prayed for a child, and felt both sorrow and social disgrace in being childless.

Zechariah had been chosen to enter the sanctuary of the Temple and offer incense as part of the daily worship at the Temple. Once inside, an angel spoke to him. It reassured the terrified Zechariah, then gave him momentous news: his wife Elizabeth would conceive and have a son. The angel was specific. The child would be great in the sight of God, would be filled with the Spirit from his conception, and would prepare the way for the Messiah.

Despite the extraordinary circumstances, Zechariah expressed doubts that this could happen, because of his wife's age and their whole past. There was genuine confusion on his part, but also the sense that he was objecting, as he asked for a sign. The angel responded by naming itself 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God'. The angel rendered him unable to speak again until the things foretold had come to pass, because Zechariah lacked the faith to believe in a miracle. When Zechariah came out of the Temple he was unable to speak.

Zechariah had doubted, but Elizabeth never did. When her cousin Mary came to visit, pregnant with Jesus, Elizabeth's unborn baby responded by suddenly moving and kicking in her womb. Elizabeth took this sudden movement, at this particular meeting, as a sign. In a moment of spiritual clarity, Elizabeth recognized she was being visited by the mother of the expected Messiah. She pronounced a blessing on the younger woman: *'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'*

Mary responded with the words of the song called the Magnificat. Elizabeth's commitment and dedication to God was not based on what He had done (or not done) but on her love for Him. Elizabeth had a vital role to play in the plan of God. We may not always understand God but we should never cease trusting Him. The beauty in the life of Elizabeth is that God used her as a clear picture of Christian ministry. Elizabeth might have been old enough to be Mary's mother. Yet they both had children at the same time. Age is no hindrance to God's blessing, and neither are the sorrows of the past. Keep loving the Lord out of a pure heart and His will for your life will be fulfilled.

Faith in the Home: New Year's Resolutions

The beginning of a New Year is traditionally a time to review the high and low points of the past, and to set goals for the future. It's a good time, then, to look at our spiritual life as well, and see if we are happy where we are, and what we might like to change.

A resolution is more than just a wish for things to be different. To succeed, any resolution needs five separate elements.

- Envision your goal
- Formulate a plan
- Consider the gain
- Count the cost
- Do the work necessary to achieve the goal.

So a person who feels stressed and distant from God might set a goal of a deeper connection to God in the coming year. And ways to get there might be to spend time in daily prayer, or to read a portion of the Bible every day, or to meditate for 10 minutes every morning. The resolved person would plan the steps to take towards the goal. And also, would make sure to have a Bible, or decide where to go for daily prayer or meditation.

To make a resolution successful, it's important to know what you hope to gain. A deeper connection to God might give a person some small but daily release from life's pressures, or help create a more hopeful attitude, or provide some insight about the meaning behind every day reality. The resolved person keeps that goal in mind.

To be successful it's important to be realistic. Any achievement has its cost. Any daily activity takes time on a daily basis, and a busy parent would have to allocate time from other things. So the resolved person takes that into account, and decides how much time, and when, has to be dedicated to this goal. And the resolved person will also expect to be excited some times, and bored some times, and confused some times while making the effort. And will keep with study, or prayer, or meditation, even when it's not convenient or new, to see where it leads.

The last step is the process of keeping the resolution; following the specific plan to get to the goal. So the resolved person will periodically consider whether she is following her plan, and notice how it is working. The resolved person will also check her progress against her goal, and change her plans when it's necessary. Setting that goal and observing the process of achieving it could lead to a deeper connection to God and others in the New Year.

Mothers' Morning of Reflection

Last month's Mother's Morning of Reflection was embraced by 28 moms. Many resolutions are made in January - why not make a resolution to give yourself one hour a month to attend the monthly Mother's morning of reflection at St. Leo's. Just an hour a month can really recharge your spiritual life.

The next Mothers Morning of Reflection will be held on January 18 from 9:30 -10:30 in the Rose Room of the Parish Center. Please join us, and feel free to bring a friend.

If you plan on attending – please RSVP to Tricia Hicks at trixhix1@yahoo.com.

School and Religious Education Happenings

January 8 – Polar Plunge

January 9 – Epiphany Retreat – 3rd Grade Religious Education

January 15 – Mass for 2nd & 3rd Grade – 11:30 AM

January 18 – Mom's Morning of Reflection – 9:30AM– Parish Center

January 29 – Feb 5 - Catholic Schools week

January 31 – Open house for SLG families



Catholic Schools Week is **January 29 - February 5, 2012.**

The theme for Catholic Schools Week 2012 is "Catholic Schools: Faith. Academics. Service." The annual observance starts the last Sunday in January and runs all week, which in 2012 is January 29 to February 5. As always, Saint Leo the Great will celebrate the week with grand style – stay tuned for the complete schedule of activities in the upcoming weeks!

The theme focuses on three priorities that Catholic schools establish that make them stand out from other educational institutions. Children are taught faith – not just the basics of Christianity, but how to have a relationship with God. Academics, which in Catholic schools are held to very high standards, help each child reach his or her potential. Service, the giving of one's time and effort to help others, is taught both as an expression of faith and good citizenship.

We at Saint Leo's are blest with a dedicated and talented team of administrators, teachers, aides, and staff who lovingly guide our children in faith, academics and service! Thank you!

Prayer for Catholic Schools Week

*Lord Jesus, Son of God,
Thank you for the gift of Catholic education.
Day after day, week after week,
you give us many opportunities to grow and learn.
Help us respond to the gift of faith so that we may be recognized as your disciples.*

Amen.

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