

Get Back on Track with God

January 2, 2022

Fr. Jacob Bush

Happy New Year! It's hard to believe but the year 2021 is over and 2022 has now begun. Most of us get to the start of a new year and think about all the changes we want to make in our lives. We make "New Year Resolutions." And for a few weeks we faithfully stick with them. And there is nothing wrong with resolutions, so long as they are consistent with Scripture and with godly character.

What does Scripture say about new beginnings? For that we need to begin in Genesis. No doubt some hear the word, 'Genesis' and automatically think of Phil Collins or maybe even Peter Gabriel. But the word, 'Genesis' means the origin of something, or the beginning of something. The first three chapters speak about the origin of the human condition. First about our creation and then about the fall.

What does the first verse of the Bible say? Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In the beginning, who? God! If we are to have a new start, begin a new routine we must start with God. God created us, and He created us with a plan in mind. From Jeremiah 29:11, "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'"

Let's say we had a painting, and we wondered about what the purpose of it was, what it was about, what the artist was thinking when he or she painted it. What would we do? We could try to figure it out on our own, but most likely we would not have the correct answer to the question. But if we were able to communicate with the artist, we would know exactly what the painting was about. And could then tell others because we have first-hand knowledge having spoken with the artist.

How many times do we try to figure out what we should do without consulting the One who made us? We are able to communicate with God through prayer. We have His Word written for us that we can read and follow. And if we are in tune with Him, we will hear Him speak to us. We need to take the time to quiet ourselves and the world around us so that we can hear Him. What do we read in the gospels regarding Jesus Christ? He went to a solitary place to pray. Jesus is the Son of God, and we see Him setting that example for us. "In the beginning God." Everything we do must start with God, must show that our relationship with God almighty is the most important relationship we have.

And that's tough to do sometimes because of the fall. Genesis 3 tells us that Adam and Eve sinned against God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which the Lord commanded them not to do. As a result, death entered the human experience, along with a natural propensity to sin. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23. "There is no one righteous, no not even one" Psalm 14:3, Psalm 53:3, Romans 3:12. It's the fall of mankind, it's our own sin that leads to the need to "get back on track" as it were. It's because of our sin that we make New Year's resolutions or goals to get back on track. And it's

because of our sin that we have trouble keeping resolutions, our sin distracts us from what really matters in life.

We see this in Scripture with Israel. First during the exodus. God sends plagues on Egypt and the people go free from their bondage. God splits the waters for them so that they cross on dry land. And the people rebel against Him in the desert by making a golden calf and worshipping the calf. They needed to get back on the right track. And that brings us to our first reading for today from Exodus 34.

Recall that while the people were making the golden calf Moses was on Mount Sinai meeting with God, receiving the ten commandments. When Moses went down the mountain and saw what the people were doing, he smashed the two tablets the commandments were written on. In Exodus 34 we read that God restored the ten commandments to the people. It was a renewal of the covenant God made with the people of Israel. In effect, the people made the resolution to obey the Lord.

The resolution was based on obedience to the Law. "Now the Lord said to Moses, 'Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain.'" The ten commandments were restored to Israel. The covenant was renewed. And Moses prayed, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession."

The renewal was not just based on the fact that God was God, but it was based on obedience to God, and being wholly dedicated to Him. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have the right to be called the children of God (John 1:12). Any resolution that we make must not only begin with God but also must be consistent with being his son or daughter. Our thoughts, our speech, our actions all must flow out of our relationship with God.

Again, look at the example of Israel and Judah. Recall that after King Solomon died, the kingdom was split in two with Israel in the North and Judah in the South. Both nations had kings rule over them. Some good, some evil. The consequence of their evil was being conquered and exiled. Israel was conquered by Assyria and Judah by Babylon. And God gave them both a chance to repent before they were conquered. But there are two kings in particular that we need to look at, and those are Hezekiah and Josiah.

Both did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. From 2 Kings 18:4, Hezekiah, "removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it." Josiah did similar things in 2 Kings 23. He eliminated the idolatrous priests, burned idols, and destroyed altars made to other gods. Both kings made sure that only God Almighty was worshipped in Judah.

This reiterates the point that all of our thoughts, our speech, our actions must flow out of our relationship with the Living God. Any resolution that we make must be to improve our

relationship with Jesus Christ. We must make sure that what we eliminate from our lives is the sin that entangles us. And we must make the worship of the Triune God a priority.

Our ultimate goal must be to strengthen our relationship with God in Christ, to worship Him and no one else, to worship nothing else, to eliminate evil from our lives, to be better witnesses for Christ. That should be our New Year's resolution. Nothing wrong with resolving to read more books, or spend less time playing video games, or losing weight, or getting in better physical shape. Those are all good things. But those good things must flow out of our faith.

We could resolve to read more. But if what we are reading does not glorify God, what good is it? There are plenty of books available that do help us to grow in our relationship with Christ. And there is always room to read Scripture more. And that is definitely a more productive use of the time we have been given than playing video games.

Getting in better physical shape, or maintaining our physical bodies is a good thing too. But we have to make sure that our desire to do so flows from the right place. Our bodies are a gift from God. We are stewards of our bodies. As such we do need to take care of them. We shouldn't work out because we want others to like us but rather because we want to take care of what God has given to us. It shows that we are serious about being good stewards.

The same is true in our finances. We are stewards of the finances that God has given to us. It all belongs to God. Tithing and being wise with the monies God has given to us shows that we understand that it all belongs to God. It is part of our Christian witness. Not that we are showy with our stewardship, indeed we are not. But being good stewards of our bodies and monies is between us and the Lord. It flows from our faith; it flows from our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Finally, we need to persevere in our relationship with Christ. Hebrews 10:36 states, "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised." Endurance says that we will continue on no matter what. We do not give up on our resolution to improve our relationship with Christ after a few weeks, as most people do with their New Year's resolutions. Instead, we continue on. We do not lose heart. We do not grow weary. We keep going. It is difficult to follow Christ in this life. It is difficult to keep His commandments. It is difficult to root evil out of our lives. But it is so worth it. "So that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised." What was promised? Eternal life with God. No pain, no grief, no sorrows. Pure joy being with God forever. All because of what Christ did on the cross, dying for us, and then rising to life again.

May this be a year in which we all grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. May we remember that God created us, that He gave us all bodies and monies to be stewards of, that we strive to do what pleases Him, and be better witnesses for Christ. And may we all do so with diligence, rooting evil out of our lives, and with endurance, continuing on no matter what.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!