

“BE IT RESOLVED”: THE VALUE OF NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS

Of the **Seven Wonders** of the Ancient World, only the Great Pyramids of Giza still exist. The ancient Greek poet Antipater (2nd c. BC) shared his observations as follows: “I have set eyes on the wall of lofty **Babylon** on which is a road for chariots, and the **statue of Zeus** by the Alpheus, and the **hanging gardens**, and the **Colossus** of the Sun, and the huge labour of the high **pyramids**, and the vast tomb of **Mausolus**; but when I saw the **house of Artemis** that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, ‘Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand.’ You might say he wrote a bit of an ancient **AAA Trip Tik!** With all due respect to Antipater, historians today question whether the Hanging Gardens of Babylon existed. Still, the Babylonians contributed much to society and culture and on this first day of the new year, we owe them a heartfelt thank you!

Situated on the banks of the Euphrates River, the site of ancient Babylon would fascinate me. But the region’s political situation makes that an impossibility. The ancient metropolis of **Babylon** is located about **70 miles** south of Baghdad International Airport. Somehow, I cannot fathom renting a car in Iran and making the trip! However, to the Babylonians is credited the earliest custom of **New Year’s resolutions**. In approximately 2000 BC, the Babylonians celebrated a 12-day festival—just like the State Fair!—to inaugurate the farming season. Part of the festival including making promises to **pay their debts**, including returning any borrowed farm equipment. Gee, I wonder if anyone from the US Federal government reads this column? If you have been paying attention to the debt to GDP ratio (currently at 124%), you know we’re in big trouble. But I digress.

The ancient Romans adopted the Babylonian tradition of resolutions, but switched up the calendar, making **January 1** the start of the new year. January was named for the two-faced Roman god **Janus**, who looks forward to new beginnings as well as backwards for reflection. This makes good sense to me. I encourage you to have some resolutions. Permit me to share a few ideas. First, **set** your **alarm** 15 minutes earlier tomorrow than it is today. Undoubtedly, it will be a mild shock to the system, but you’ll get used to it. You could use that time for prayer and reflection. Commit to doing this daily straight away at the beginning. Secondly, consider adopting a Friday penance in the form of fasting. Many Catholics are unaware that even after the Vatican Council II reforms, Fridays **retain** their **penitential** character, allowing us to substitute another form of penance other than abstinence from meat.

Pope St. Paul VI’s Apostolic Constitution on Penance (17 Feb. 1966) **relaxed** universal fasting **norms**, allowing greater emphasis on local customs via local episcopal conferences. When our U.S. Bishops issued national norms for penance and abstinence, they highlighted the **rationale** behind penances, encouraging us to **avoid** rote practices without sufficient reflection. Fair enough. But what happened instead was a **near total** disregard for all but Lenten Fridays, even though neither Paul VI’s document nor the U.S. Norms support that reading. Whether they should have seen that coming is fodder for church historians. The U.S. Bishops noted: “Friday itself remains a special day of penitential observance throughout the year, a time when those who seek perfection will be mindful of their personal sins and the sins of mankind which they are called upon to help expiate in union with Christ Crucified.” (U.S. Norms #22, 18 Nov. 1966)

Thus, I humbly and yet heartily encourage you to recover the genuine sense of penance and fasting in 2023, for I believe that you will see both spiritual and physical benefits. Go ahead, weigh yourself today— don’t delay. Write it down and begin a program. The Italians have a saying,

“meglio poco che niente,” translated as “Something’s better than nothing.” You must start somewhere. Just **begin!** A third resolution you make could be around **organization**, something about which I have noticed some slippage on my part. I need to organize and track e-mail correspondence much better, lest things get lost in the shuffle. I should have listened to my dad, who died four years ago next week. He kept **meticulous** notes and records and held fast to the principle, “Never let something pass your desk more than once.” Thus, deal with issues right away—do not set them aside. While easier said than done, it works. These are all among my continuing resolutions.

So, what about 2023? Nothing quite like putting oneself on the spot. My **top 10 ten** resolutions: 1) Do not let fatigue prevent praying a **daily rosary**. 2) Do not waste any food—take small portions. 3) Keep a cleaner office desk. 4) Do not let a day go by without saying “Thank you” to someone for something. 5) Be a “glass half full” person, less curmudgeonly regarding the city of St. Paul’s challenges (not super confident on **this** one). 6) Enjoy more microwave **bacon** (I’ll nail this one!) 7) Support and implement the **Synod** priorities here in the Cathedral parish. 8) Spend quality time with family members. 9) **Bid** and make a Grand Slam contract in Bridge. 10) Turn **60** with dignity and grace, without a trace of **grey hair!** Only time will tell. May you and your family have a blessed New Year.

- I was most pleased with our Christmas Mass **turnout**—it is never easy to predict, factoring in the frigid winter weather and the abnormality of Christmas falling on a Sunday. Due to **leap year** occurrence, the next time we will celebrate Christmas on Sunday will be in **2033**. By then, I should be comfortably settling into my new digs at the **Archbishop Leo Byrne Residence** for retired priests!
- Football loyalties aside, when the **Vikings** visit Lambeau Field today, know that as Catholics we have more in common with our **Packers** neighbors than with any other state. The Milwaukee Archdiocese has 700,000 Catholics, representing **29.6%** of the total population. We have closer 800,000+ Catholics (perhaps a bit inflated), representing **26%** of the metro population. Due to more mid-size cities, Wisconsin population is 5.9 million, compared to our 5.7 million. By **wiping** Green Bay off the map (or field!), we’re dead even!
- Poor ‘ole **St. Nicholas** didn’t have a chance. As I engaged in a strict pre-Christmas fast, when Christmas Eve rolled around, I certainly savored every bite. I shared solid milk chocolate St. Nicholas treats with our children’s **choristers** and **altar servers**. But the box included several more than I had ordered. Let’s just say the first “extra” did not last long. Gone in (nearly) 60 seconds!
- Pray a **Family Rosary** today—honor our Blessed Mother together and ask for her intercession on your household. The family that prays together stays together.
- **Frozen out!** Baby Jesus had comfortable, albeit **lonely digs** in the sacristy, the first few nights of Christmas. Try as we may, the lock to the outdoor creche was frozen shut. Finally, on the third day (Feast of St. John), the lock thawed. I am happy to report that the Holy Family has been reunited!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector