

DEDICATING A NEW YEAR TO GOD

As we celebrate New Year's Day, we are allowed to let go of the past year and look with hope to the year ahead. Like many sports fans who always look forward to a new season, our next year begins now. It is an invitation to look at a 2021 where many may receive vaccines. It is a year when we will hear with anticipation of the lifting of restrictions. Like 2020, it will be like no other. New normalcy will be established and the effects of what we all have encountered with the virus will begin to shape our new interactions of the future.

With this as the backdrop, the Church invites us to embrace the opportunity to begin the New Year with our focus on Mary, the Holy Mother of God. Her holiness is to inspire us, her trust in God is to show us the way and her love for our Savior is to deepen our efforts to do the same. This year like no other we begin with a child of God, a virgin betrothed to Joseph, embracing a new direction in her life so we can embrace a new year and a new direction in ours.

May this year bring us together,



Father John

THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF THE FAMILY

Now more than ever we have been invited to share quality time and settle into close quarters with our families. From lockdowns to education, from work at home options, multi-tasking and reallocating living space has become part of the ritual of 2020. At the start of it all, I celebrated Eucharist every day in the chapel in the rectory. Furniture was changed around as the focus and purpose intensified. Everyone has a story of house rearrangement and re-purposing. Growing up, our house was decorated for the seasons, and of course, like everyone else we knew, we kicked it up to a high level at Christmas. Our dinner table was always special. Since after my ordination, I was unable to attend the traditional Christmas Eve dinner we celebrated with my mom's side of the family, I would buy the flowers for the table to remind them I was a part of the time they spent together. Each year I would work with the florist to create something unique. The table is the place of gathering in most homes.

For Advent this year, knowing that everything is so different, one of the disciplines of my Advent was to change the look of my dinner table setting each week. Creating a new environment of inspiration to welcome the Christ child was a weekly project. With each new week, everything was removed from the table. I would add something or subtract something to create a new table. I would change the tablecloth or place mats or do something different to create a new table each week. It sent a message to me to become welcoming and create an inviting and inspirational environment to bring me peace. Each week, it was a ritual of taking everything off the table and resetting it.

When I think of this Feast of the Holy Family, I think about the welcoming environment Mary and Joseph created. I think about how angels intervened and so did the reality of welcoming a baby into the world. Many things happen around our tables in our homes. Now more than ever we have been gathering there day after day with fewer distractions. May holiness bound forth in the new time. May the sensitivity of listening be renewed. May the quality of time bring us to the doorway of holiness.

For me, Advent led me to the table and the environment I took for granted. Having the inspiration change each week deepened my awareness of the holiness of all families and the quality of time that has been given as a gift.



Father John Ouper