

Happy New Year! I write this from my Storeloft home on a crisp December day with snow gently covering the ground. The stillness of the solitude is so silent that I feel the heartbeat of everything. I am in awe and as scripture says 'alive for God in Christ Jesus' is something I feel deeply as these sabbatical days continue to unfold. I am grateful for this sabbatical time and I look forward to seeing you in a few short weeks. I need you to know I am rejuvenated with energy and ready to continue building Christian community rooted in the mission, vision and values we developed together in ministry. But first, what can I say on the cusp of another year?

My dear parishioners, I ponder and sometimes am preoccupied by the realities of life unfolding in this weary world and in this church of ours. We live in extraordinary times! I wonder, where are the political saviours that could bring hope to this seemingly crazy world. The chaos of the world presented to us by Herods of other names leaves us unsettled and uneasy about the things we take for granted, like our democracy. We cry out, "What can we do?" I suggest we ponder the following question, "Do we believe that hope and good sense can and will prevail?" Jesus Christ still speaks, and we must keep our eyes firmly on Him and his promise to travel this pilgrim way with us. We must marvel at the essence of this season, a God with us and for us, a truth we need to remember in these times of kingdom building not rooted in Christ. On this World Day of Prayer for peace we must recommit to being people of peace and hope and love.

Today, New Year's Day, is a day when many feel drawn to make good resolutions. What better New Year's resolution could we make today than that of adopting Mary's stance before the grace of God? Today's feast invites us to share in Mary's sense of awe and wonder before God's merciful love, made known to us in Christ, her son. As we look towards the New Year, we ask Mary to help us to treasure the gospel as she did, so that Christ might come to others through us as he came to us through Mary. The same gospel has been handed on to us, and we are invited to treasure it, to ponder it and to respond to it, as Mary did.

In short, let us be open and make room for God's Spirit, who blows where she wills. In 2019 may Mary, Mother of God, intercede for us. My prayer is that God may grace each one of you and awaken in you the truth of a joy beyond all telling; the Lord is in our midst. May we be renewed by the words of a Saint for our times, Saint Oscar Romero, who wrote "... Jesus's birth attests that God is now marching with us in history, that we do not go alone, and that our aspirations for peace, for justice, for a reign of divine law, for something holy, is far from earth's realities. We can hope for it, not because we humans are able to construct that realm of happiness which God's word proclaims, but because the builder of that reign of justice, of love, and of peace is already in the midst of us."

Happy New Year and with love and affection I greet you this day.
Father William