

Gifts of and for the new year

Phyllis Zagano | Dec. 19, 2012 Just Catholic

The new calendar brings hope. But before we fill up every page and schedule every little block of time, maybe a little planning for the gift of a new year is in order.

We still suffer from the Connecticut rampage of a 20-year-old man with an assault rifle. Actually, we suffer from the fact that there are thousands of 20-year-olds holding assault rifles all over the world. They are in Afghanistan and Yemen; they are in Somalia and Pakistan. If truth be told, they may be just next door, no matter where we are.

We suffer from the ravages of intended killings, whether murderous or made legal by the subtleties of international law. We suffer from the unending stream of news reports and pictures, of simple people young and old dying, dead and being buried. We suffer from an unabated anger stirred in hearts and minds by forces clearly not intended to bring peace and understanding. We suffer from the Technicolor onslaught of what passes as our "culture."

Where can we hide, as anger takes its creepy path to every corner of our lives? How can we defend against dangers both physical and emotional? Will the stranger's horn-honking escalate to road rage? Will the boss scream uncontrollably about the postage budget? Will a spouse's words fly sharply, cracking the relationship?

The season leading up to new calendars carries with it all the messiness of life and reminders of all the things not done, not gotten, not completed, not understood, not found. Amidst fading poinsettias and dropping pine needles, the freshness of the new year fades even before it has begun.

Let's change that. Let's each one of us bring a box to New Year's Day and fill it with what we really need for the year ahead. Let's look around and find within us things we have already but perhaps fear exposing to the harshness of the angry storms about.

The list is ancient, but it's good.

First, dust off wisdom. That would be insight into to what is true. It is our personal and innate discernment, that little fraud detector that mirrors the really real. Pack it in the box first, and don't forget it's there, supporting everything else.

Then find understanding amidst the rubble of the year gone past. It soothes speculations about all sorts of facts. It also helps us give the other guy a break. It's all about relationships, both spatial and emotional.

Next comes good counsel given freely. Too often, we forget good advice, especially when one passion or another blocks our memories. There is what is right. There is what is wrong. Good counsel from without seeds good counsel's growth within.

You'll need to include fortitude in the new year's box. That means risk-taking. That means doing the right thing.

That means, sometimes, losing work or friends or position. It has sharp edges, but it will fit.

Then, put a dose of knowledge in there. Some people think knowledge is only facts, and only what can be proven scientifically is true. But there are so many intangible things we know or should know, things we believe or should believe. Pack them in there tightly. Don't let them rattle around too much.

If you are very brave, you'll add piety before you close the lid. That's reverence for God and God's creation. It does not mean being "pious." It means agreeing in humility that you are not in charge of everything.

Then wrap it all with what the Medievalists called fear of the Lord. Please don't picture some old guy sitting on a cloud. Just live in wonder and awe of all that is and all that might someday be. Make it the first thing you see when you come upon your box of newness; make it the first thing you enjoy each day.

Then as the unblemished days of the new year turn into weeks and then months, enjoy your birthright gifts day by shining day. And when you have the chance, spread them around.

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