



**Janaury, 2018** Merry Christmas! Blessings in this new year of our Lord, 2018. This month's issue of Impact invites people to resolve to surrender their hearts and lives to the Lord in the coming year, and to do so by looking, listening, and responding to the light of God's love. Our opening article this month was written by Amberly, and brings a fresh perspective to the process of making new year's resolutions. The reverse side reminds people that we continue to celebrate the Christmas season, and to move into Ordinary Time by hearing the stories of people who saw God's glory and heard the Lord's voice, and responded with their lives. We pray your Christmas and the start of this new year will be filled with grace, light and peace for you and your people.

— Leisa Anslinger and Amberly Boerschinger

### Homily Connections

**January 7:** The story of the magi is a familiar one, even to people who rarely participate in Mass. Today is a wonderful opportunity to connect the magi, who searched and longed for the coming of the Messiah, to our daily lives. For what do we search? What gifts will we bring to the Lord in this new year?

**Connecting with everyday life:** God's light shines in the darkness. Consider naming some of the dark places that people experience: death, anxiety, uncertainty, disruptions in relationships, the longing for something more in life. Think about this from your own experience and your interactions with parishioners. How does the light of God's love change these situations into places filled with hope, peace, and love? What gifts do we bring to share this light with others?

**January 14:** Samuel did not yet recognize God's voice when he was called. The disciples of John the Baptist were attuned to the quest for the Messiah, but certainly did not know what they would find when they heard John's testimony, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The disciples and Samuel listened and responded by turning their lives over to God.

**Connecting with everyday life:** In these early weeks of the new year, it is good to invite people to resolve to make this year different, by making a new, deeper commitment to the Lord. Share today what it means to discern God's will. Those who come to Mass but do not often think about growth in faith will benefit from your wisdom in how we listen and respond to God's loving presence, and how we help each other to do so. Point out that Samuel and the disciples recognized God's voice through others. Each of us may have a profound impact on the people in our lives through the witness of the importance of faith, helping each other to recognize and respond to God's love.

**January 21:** The people of Nineveh and the first disciples were quick to respond to God's invitation. Are we also open and eager to turn our lives over to God? Today's second reading from 1 Corinthians points to a single-mindedness in living faith. While the people in Corinth may have expected that the Lord would return within their earthly lives, Paul's encouragement is for us as well. Faith is to influence and direct our daily decisions. Anything contrary to the gospel is to be avoided.

**Connecting with everyday life:** There is an almost Lenten tone to the readings today, and yet the message is clear. Following Jesus with our lives means that we must turn away from things that are counter to gospel living, and to stay focused on God's ways. Share examples of the sorts of things we must turn away from, and the impact of single-minded faith in life — situations at work or school in which friends or co-workers expect us to go along with bullying or petty disagreements, or deeper unethical actions; lack of patience or willingness to give family members the benefit of the doubt in disagreements; judgmental attitudes about others; failure to see the needs of people and to go out to others in service and compassion. In each situation, hearing God's voice and responding can make all the difference, in our own lives and those of the people around us.

**January 28:** God has the power to act in our lives, to give us freedom and peace in moments of anxiety, to heal us in body, mind and spirit. In today's gospel, Jesus does just this, to the astonishment of those present.

**Connecting with everyday life:** Invite your people to reflect on what in their lives needs healing. Remind them that at times, the healing that is offered is not physical healing in times of illness, but rather that God will give us the strength to live in holiness regardless of the circumstances of our lives. Share an example of healing in reconciliation, the Sacrament of the Sick, or in the on-going journey of relationship with God, and encourage your people to ask God for what they need.

## At Parish Meetings or in Adult Faith Formation this Month

### Opening Prayer

Loving God,  
send your light to dispel our darkness,  
your peace to our anxiety,  
your strength in times of weakness and fear,  
your love in moments of uncertainty.  
Give us willing hearts, to seek you in our daily lives,  
hear your voice, and respond to your love.  
May we be ready to give our lives to you,  
and to grow as your holy people in this near year.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is one with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Listen to Sacred Scripture:** [1 SM 3:3B-10, 19](#)

**Read:** Look. Listen. Respond.

**Share:** your thoughts, using these questions to guide your reflection:

What helps you to see God's light and love?

What is the impact of knowing that God is always present, and calls you in the moments of your daily life?

**Commit:** Use Impact this year to guide your plans for your life of faith in the coming year.

**Offer one another a sign of Christ's peace.**

## JANUARY IS A TIME FOR NEW BEGINNINGS

---

It is a time for reprioritizing and trying again. It is a time for surrender.

Wait, what??? You read correctly, it is a time for surrender.

God is constantly calling us back. God wants to be with us. He desires us, our whole selves. The question we must ask is: are we comfortable surrendering to God's desire to draw close? Surrender is a word that for many of us brings up images of depleted resources and white flags. Surrender is a bad thing that only happens to those who lose an effort. It is something that is forced by a conquering body or a circumstance. It is certainly not something that any sane person would choose to do.

Or is it?

Let's back up for a moment. At Christmas, we celebrate just how much God loves us and wants to be with us. Jesus was sent to be 100% human and share in all of our joys, trials, temptations and successes. Yes, Jesus was divine too. This is one of the great mysteries of our faith, and something that makes all the difference if we can really take it to heart. If God loves us so much that He sends us His son to be with us and guide us in this human life, why wouldn't we want to surrender to that kind of perfect love? It is hard for us to understand perfect love because human love is imperfect. However, God is perfect. God is not a conqueror. Yet God does invite us to surrender.

Unlike the world's definition of surrender, surrendering to God's will frees us! Just like God asked our Blessed Mother Mary (whose feast we conveniently celebrate on New Year's Day!), God invites us to offer Him our whole "yes" – a white flag of sorts – a pure statement of our trust in God's presence and providence. Sometimes our yes is not as complete as it could be, but we have a lifetime of opportunities to continue trying to give God our full yes.

If we say yes and surrender our whole selves to God's will, we must then be prepared to act on it. We must be willing to surrender our fear, our anxiety, our schedules and our loved ones to God's perfect plan. We must resolve to live lives of prayer, service and generosity. In this way, our lives can become a witness to God's perfect plan and provision so that others can see and be inspired to surrender to God's love and sustenance in their lives.

Resolutions can be daunting, but surrender is freeing. Surrendering our will to God is not easy, but neither is sticking to resolutions. There are many ways we see, hear, and know God's will.\* Perhaps the best resolution we can make this year is to surrender to God's loving will for us and for the world. God will show you. Trust Him.

© Catholic Life and Faith, 2018

## Impact this year

Use these ideas to bring faith to your daily life and find life in faith in the coming year:

**PRAY EVERY DAY.** Tell God what is in your heart and on your mind, and allow God's love to touch you.

**TRULY PARTICIPATE** in the Mass, and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Open your heart and mind to the Lord.

**READ THE BIBLE.** Find words of encouragement, consolation, and challenge in Sacred Scripture.

**TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT FAITH.** You are likely to be inspired by their sharing, and they from yours.

**LEARN MORE** about our Catholic faith, through study, small faith sharing, and adult faith formation.

**READ THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS.** They show us that God speaks to each of us as ordinary people with the ups and downs of daily life.

**PAY ATTENTION** to those who are poor, lonely, ill, or in prison. Not only do they need our care, they also witness to God's compassion for the weak and broken.

**SERVE WITH A GLAD AND GENEROUS HEART.** You will see God's love in action.

**LOOK. LISTEN. RESPOND.**

---

"We have seen his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." (MT 2:2)

The magi were looking. It was not an accident that they journeyed to Bethlehem, having seen the star at its rising. They were attentive, searching, and ready to go when the time was right.

Others saw too. The shepherds were on the night watch. They were on the lookout for predators and thieves. They were stunned to see instead the glory of the Lord around them. At the angels' announcement, they also journeyed to Bethlehem, eager to see for themselves the miracle of the newborn in the most unexpected of places, the manger.

Have you seen his star? Not a physical star, but the light of God's love. Light pierces darkness, illumines shadows, and diminishes the fear of night. Do you see the glory of the Lord around you? If there is one thing that we should carry with us through the Christmas season and beyond, it is this: God is with us in all of our searching, hoping, and longing. God is here, in the midst of our everyday lives. The light of God's love shines brightly, through all of the darkness, fear, frustration, and anxiety we may experience in life. God wants to break through and to bring us peace.

This month, we hear the stories of ones who heard, listened, and responded to God's love. Samuel heard the voice of God before he was fully prepared to understand. Once aware that God was speaking to him, he earnestly responded, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Sam 3:10) The first disciples heard the voice of the Lord and they immediately followed him.

Do we see, listen, and respond to God's love? Notice that once the magi and shepherds saw the light of God's love, once Samuel and the disciples heard the Lord's voice, they were open and ready to respond. They brought their gifts, their very selves, to the Lord, allowed the light of God's love to change them, and became vessels of that love for others.

In this new year, be like the magi and the shepherds, ready to see the Lord in your midst, in the eyes of a loved one, the presence of Christ at Mass, an unexpected moment of tenderness. When you see God's love, be ready to offer him homage, and grow in love and grace.

Be like Samuel, Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Hear the voice of the Lord and respond. Bring your gifts, your very selves, to the Lord, saying, "Here I am, send me."

© Catholic Life and Faith, 2018