



CHRISTMAS

A New Kind of New Year's Resolution

by Effie Caldarola

Many of us own those wristband devices that record how many steps we take in a day. We're told that 10,000 steps daily is a healthy goal, so we take walks, use the stairs instead of the elevator, vacuum instead of watching television.

At the day's end, we can see how close we came to that 10,000-step goal.

And always, the next morning, the tally on our band is back to zero and we start again. Maybe that's the thing I like best about my wristband—it always starts fresh each day.

New Year's Day is sort of like that band. It encourages us to begin again, to roll back the markers and take a fresh approach.

From that standpoint, New Year's resolutions can be positive and hopeful. But sometimes, resolutions set us up for failure. It's hard to change behavior overnight—and for a whole year. It raises tough expectations about our own behavior, willpower, and determination.

There's a mantra I am taking with me into the new year. I heard it when I attended a workshop with the spiritual writer Kathleen Norris, and I reflect on it often.

Norris writes extensively on monastics, the desert fathers and mothers, and on the early Church. The workshop was held at a beautiful Benedictine monastery in rural Nebraska. Amid the prairie wind and the growing corn, Norris assured us that one tenet of Benedictine spirituality is the reminder, "Always we begin again."

If our New Year's resolution is to grow more deeply in love with God, to achieve a new level of spirituality,

to listen more closely to the Spirit in our life, then those four words are vital.

Because coming to God is always about invitation, surrender, and trying again. It's about acknowledging that we can't do it on our own. It has little to do with willpower and my own determination. It has everything to do with being quiet and letting go.

"Always we begin again" reminds me that falling down is a big part of spiritual growth. The big thing is not my failure but that I try again. It's seeing that marker set at zero over and over and realizing God is waiting for me in each step.

For me personally, the operative word is "always." Unlike my wristband, it's not "tomorrow" when I start again. It's in the present moment, when I'm falling and need help. Think of a bad habit: overeating, worrying, compulsive shopping. I can think of times when I've fallen and my response is, well I'll try again tomorrow—might as well finish that bag of Oreos today, may as well turn from prayer.

That Benedictine mantra reminds me that God is waiting for me right now in my falling down, not in a far off "tomorrow."

If we're considering deepening our spiritual life during 2017, we start with the wonderful feeling of invitation, not obligation. There will be ups and downs. But always, we are invited to begin again. Our God is merciful and has boundless compassion and love.

If, like me, you need some structure and support, the internet provides a wealth of help. If you Google "Ignatian Spirituality," you will find sites that bring you a plethora of suggestions on prayer. Likewise,



Creighton University's Online Ministries offers prayer guides, retreats, and links to other sites.

The Irish Jesuits' daily inspiration, "Sacred Space," can be found online and in printed versions. Your parish may provide other suggestions.

Simply spending time with the readings from each day's liturgy can be profoundly moving.

Perhaps signing up for a scripture class or a prayer group at your parish will inspire the change you seek. Pray for the opportunity God has in mind.

For me, the important thing is to open my heart in each moment, to remember that my own inadequacy is where God will meet me, always beginning again.

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