



# Impact

Discipleship. Stewardship. Evangelization.

January, 2021 Blessings to you and all in your community as we begin the new year. Like the year that we have just concluded, 2021 begins most unusually. As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, we turn to Christ, seeking consolation, strength, healing, and life. This month's issue of Impact encourages people to make a commitment, a resolution, to live and grow in faith, to make this year truly a "year of our Lord." I have included an article on the newly announced Year of St. Joseph and plan to include reflections on Joseph throughout this coming year. I pray you will remain safe and well and that this month will be filled with every blessing from our good and gracious God. - Leisa Anslinger

## Homily Connections

January 3: 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, especially in the past year. 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? (Page 1)

January 10: 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. (Page 2, top)

January 17: 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. (Page 2, bottom)

**January 24:** Today's gospel provides a second account of the call of the first disciples. In this passage from the gospel of Mark, the disciples abandoned their previous way of life in order to follow Jesus.

Connecting with everyday life: Invite your people to reflect on how the Lord may be calling them at this time. Share an example from your own life, perhaps including a moment in which responding to Christ's call was difficult, or share the way overcoming doubt or hesitation has transformed the life of another. (Page 2)

January 31: The first readings this month include familiar Biblical characters who show incredible faith in the face of very challenging circumstances. Today, we hear the story of Job, who questions the purpose of his life, suffering, and what gives life meaning. In today's gospel, Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, prompting the townspeople to bring their ill to him. Following a time of prayer, confirming the shape of his mission, he is ready to move to other villages, where he will preach and heal.

Connecting with everyday life: This is a perfect Sunday to talk about what is really important in life. What needs to change in order to more fully discern God's will and live our lives with purpose and meaning? Invite your people to search their hearts and ask themselves if they listen to God in prayer, Sacred Scripture, and through their interactions with others, including a spiritual director or mentor, as they make life decisions. Use an example from your own or someone else's life to illustrate the difference such prayerful discernment can make, and point to the impact of faith in bringing particular meaning to the shape of our lives. (Page 2)

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: Jn 1:35-42

Read: This year remain in Christ (Page 2)

Share: Use Impact this month to guide your conversation.

Commit: Pray throughout this month as you discern how the Lord is calling you. Resolve to live faith now and throughout the coming year.

Offer one another a sign of Christ's peace.

## Beginning a new year of our Lord, 2021

Resolve to live and grow in faith in the coming year

### Grace in our midst

We begin a new year. A.D. 2021. "A.D.," "Anno Domini," is a Latin phrase which means "In the year of our Lord." Thus, two letters serve to remind us that all we are and have and will be is grace -- pure gift from our good and gracious God, each and every day.

It is good to begin 2021 by reflecting on the mystery of God's presence within and around us. Even when we do not place the A.D. before the year as we mark the date on our calendars, calling it to mind will help us to grow as people who are mindful of God's grace in our midst.

This year, let us invite the Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts, to perceive the reality of God's presence, even when doing so is difficult. We seek God's love, mercy and grace by faith, and see it when we are attentive to the many blessings of our lives, in the gift of family and friends, and in the sense of fulfillment we find in serving others.

God's presence in our lives is a gift, and bears with it responsibility. We who have been given much are called to give much in return, as good stewards of God's grace. Not out of obligation, but out of deep gratitude. When we do this, we give God glory, reflecting the perfect love and gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a perfect way to begin a new year, A.D. 2021.

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### The Year of St. Joseph

Pope Francis has announced that we will mark this year A.D. 2021 as the Year of St. Joseph. In his apostolic letter *Patris Corde*, the pope invites us to learn from and be inspired by St. Joseph who shows us what it means to desire and follow God's will in our lives.

"The spiritual path that Joseph traces for us is not one that explains, but accepts. Only as a result of this acceptance, this reconciliation, can we begin to glimpse a broader history, a deeper meaning. Joseph is certainly not passively resigned, but courageously and firmly proactive. In our own lives, acceptance and welcome can be an expression of the Holy Spirit's gift of fortitude. Only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments.

God always finds a way to save us, provided we show the same creative courage as the carpenter of Nazareth, who was able to turn a problem into a possibility by trusting always in divine providence. If at times God seems not to help us, surely this does not mean that we have been abandoned, but instead are being trusted to plan, to be creative, and to find solutions ourselves.

Just as God told Joseph: "Son of David, do not be afraid!" (Mt 1:20), so he seems to tell us: "Do not be afraid!" We need to set aside all anger and disappointment, and to embrace the way things are, even when they do not turn out as we wish. Not with mere resignation but with hope and courage. In this way, we become open to a deeper meaning. Our lives can be miraculously reborn if we find the courage to live them in accordance with the Gospel." (*Patris Corde*, December 8, 2020)

We begin this new year still feeling the effects of the Covid crisis, aware of our human frailty and in need of the grace of God at each moment of every day. How will you embrace new life this year with creative courage and reliance on God's providence?

### This year, remain in Christ

Look to the first disciples and learn what it means to be open to a deep relationship with Jesus.

The gospel we hear on January 17 tells of Jesus' call of the first disciples. The disciples did not know Jesus when they first approached him asking, "where are you staying?" In first century Jewish life, aspiring disciples, those who would take on the way of a Rabbi, would have proved themselves ready through years of study before asking to learn from a master teacher. The two disciples, however, had not been proven as able students. Their only qualification was a great desire to know God's ways.

Jesus understood what was in their hearts and minds and said to them, "Come and see." Responding to this call of Christ changed the lives of the two disciples, their family and friends, and ultimately, the whole world.

As the disciples journeyed with Jesus, they realized that where he “stayed” is about much more than his physical place of residence. Jesus stayed with God, returning to God in prayer at key moments in his life and ministry, showing and sharing God’s love in word and deed, and leading his disciples to do the same. Jesus did not stray from God’s ways, even when doing so led him to death on the cross.

The two disciples remained with Jesus that first day. As he anticipated his passion, Jesus urged his disciples to remain in him. In the hours before his arrest, he asked them to stay with him. Jesus asks us to do the same—to remain in his love, becoming more like him each day.

This year, let us make a commitment to remain with the Lord, trusting in his goodness, resting in his care when we are weary, finding strength through the Holy Spirit when we are uncertain, and reaching out to others with the hope that is only found in Christ. © Catholic Life and Faith, 2021

## IMPACT THIS MONTH

As you begin this new year, make a commitment to remain in the Lord, trusting that God will guide your heart and mind and will be with you every step of the way. Prayerfully read 1 Samuel 3:7-10 as you discern how the Lord is calling you at this time.

Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’”

To what do you perceive the Lord is calling you?

Resolve to desire and to fulfill God’s will in the course of your daily life.

## Faith NOW

*A year ago, as we approached 2020, I decided to begin a regular column in Impact called Faith 2020. I intended to build on the idea of 20/20 vision - how faith gives us a particular way of seeing and responding to the circumstances of our daily lives.*

*We may be anxious to put 2020 behind us, but before we do, it is important for us to look back at what most would describe as the most challenging year of their lives and to reflect upon what we have learned or will take with us into 2021.*

*The year 2020 may have indeed helped us to have clearer vision - a deeper appreciation for the way in which our faith in Jesus Christ is our foundation, our strength and our courage. Perhaps we enter into the new year with greater appreciation for the gifts of life and faith, family and friends. Some grieve the passing of a loved one or the loss of a job. We are more mindful now of our human fragility and the strength of the human spirit. And we begin this new year in hope that the virus will be abated and we will soon be able to celebrate at the Eucharistic feast in communion with Christ and one another.*

*Let us begin this new year with renewed commitment to live as disciples and grow as good and faithful stewards of all that has been entrusted to us. May 2021 be a year in which we know and share the goodness of the Lord. May we live faith NOW.*

*- Leisa Anslinger*

