

Mary the Mother of God/New Year's Day 2021

On a new year's (eve) day and on the Solemn Feast of Mary, the Mother of God, it is customary to pray for peace – peace in our hearts and certainly peace in the world. But this year, in addition to praying for peace, I am praying at the beginning of this new year for 3 other virtues: Surprise. Hope. Patience. 3 gifts that I resolve to work on and ask for God's help in 2021.

2020 was a year that broke every sense of normalcy. It was a year requiring us to do old things in new ways. I admit that I agree with many people who have reduced their feelings about moving away from 2020 to 2 words: Good riddance!

It has been a year unlike any before, and we are challenged to find God in unusual ways. Maybe we can't find God in the normal places. We often think of finding God in church, at Mass, but most are feeling safe to gather for mass these days.

I have three short points. Surprise. Hope. Patience

SURPRISE was a gift that Mary had a great handle on. A surprise visit from an angel changed her life. And she allowed God to surprise her not once but many, many, times! Look for God in unusual places, in unusual manifestations in this unusual time. Allow yourself to be surprised by God's presence.

Second point. We must live in HOPE, and the word of God speaks with the assurance that the Spirit (who lives within us) helps us, intercedes for us, to help bring us to the place where we can act according to God's will. As we start this new year, we must seek the Spirit's strength to remain people of hope.

Third point. I'll be frank with you, I struggle and wrestle the most with this one these days ... PATIENCE. I often imagine that I would happily push a fast forward button and just skip all the uncertainty and challenge that lies ahead. Let's get this whole pandemic thing done with and over.

But I (we) need to pray to be patient, because God's grace will undoubtedly be abundant in this year ahead, coming in unexpected, surprising ways, coming through the intercession of the Holy Spirit, to those who patiently wait for it. Of that I am quite certain. But it does test my patience.

There was a French Jesuit who died in 1955 named Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who was a philosopher and paleontologist. His writings were controversial in his day, he was silenced at one point by his superiors and later, after his death, by Popes past and present. There is a beautiful spiritual teaching of his that is entitled *Patient Trust*. I find it quite encouraging when I'm struggling with patience, and I find it very appropriate for us today as we set out on this journey of a new year. He writes:

Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet, it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time. And so, I think it is with you, your ideas mature gradually—let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his Hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

Friends, as we begin 2021, let us allow ourselves to be surprised by how God approaches us; let us be people of hope as we trust that the Spirit will guide us; let us be patient – with ourselves and with others – as we come to recognize God’s grace happening all around us. There is no need to desire to fast forward through this year. 2021 will be year of grace found in unusual, surprising ways. May we, with Mary our heavenly Mother live in the fullness of peace, surprise, hope, and patience throughout the new year. May the Spirit come to our aid as the Spirit intercedes for us each and every day. Amen.

Happy, Healthy and Safe New Year!