

Volunteer, stop judging and get off Twitter: 8 New Year's Resolutions Inspired by Pope Francis



If you cannot believe it is about to be 2022 (wasn't 2019 like seven months ago?), you are not alone. But ready or not, the new year is here and with it our annual opportunity to take stock and set goals, with a little help from Pope Francis.

Since the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, Francis has had two refrains: We are all "in the same boat," and "our post-pandemic world will necessarily be different from what it was before the pandemic." With that in mind, we mined the pope's homilies and speeches from the past year for advice for building stronger relationships—with God, with our neighbors and with the earth.

1. Volunteer for a local charity or non-profit.

In 2022, maybe you would like to give back in a meaningful way by volunteering at an organization that does good work in your community. But where do you start? And how do you choose where to give your time?

Pope Francis has some ideas, taking a page from someone who knows a thing or two about selflessness: St. Joseph. In [the first of a series of catecheses on St. Joseph](#), Pope Francis said, "Today, Joseph teaches us this: 'Do not look so much at the things that the world praises, look into the corners, look in the shadows, look at the peripheries, at what the world does not want.' He reminds each of us to consider important what others discard."

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Let us ask ourselves: Who is forgotten or ignored? What resources do I have to share that might help someone else? How can I reorient my thinking so I am more concerned with what matters to God than what matters to earthly society? With these questions guiding our discernment, maybe we can make time in our busy and chaotic lives this year not simply to volunteer but to become what Pope Francis calls St. Joseph: masters of the essential.

2. Stop judging others.

Judging and gossiping about those around us is, as [Pope Francis said in his audience on Nov. 3](#), so easy to do that we often fall into it without thinking.

The pope offered a challenging alternative, to instead "take a look at yourself." With this shift in perspective, Pope Francis suggests we might discover something important: "It is good to ask ourselves what drives us to correct a brother or a sister, and if we are not in some way co-responsible for their mistake." Instead of nitpicking our neighbors, we can be honest with ourselves about our own shortcomings, making space for compassion

instead of criticism

3. Take Scripture to heart.

Becoming more familiar with the Bible in the new year is a great goal, but be careful: Without the right approach, you might find yourself annoying Pope Francis. [In his audience on Jan. 27](#), the pope admitted, "It irritates me a little when I hear Christians who recite verses from the Bible like parrots."

Of course, the pope was not discouraging Catholics from reading and knowing the Bible. Quite the opposite! Pope Francis was expressing frustration with an approach to Scripture that focuses simply on rote memorization rather than on personal encounter. His words reminded us that sacred Scripture is alive, that it speaks to us on an individual basis. Even though biblical stories are thousands of years old, we can recognize ourselves intimately in the characters and scenarios.

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So please, read and study the Bible this year. But know what Pope Francis says you're signing up for: "The Word of God, infused with the Holy Spirit, when it is received with an open heart, does not leave things as they were before: never."

4. Take one concrete step to become more environmentally conscious. (And start now!)

This year, world leaders gathered in Glasgow to discuss climate change at COP26. While Pope Francis was unable to be there in person, he did share [a message](#). And let's just say this: He did not hold back.

If you want to do your part to protect the planet, here is the big takeaway from the pope's words: You should start now. Francis wrote to the

conference with a tone of great urgency, recommending courses of action for both leaders and civilians. If there are lifestyle changes you have wanted to make in an effort to be more environmentally conscious, now is the time to get around to them. If there are things you think political leaders could be doing to protect all of us from the climate crisis, make them known—through your voice and your vote. As the pope said, “there is no time to waste.”

[\[Related: Four ways your parish can fight climate change \(on a budget\)\]](#)

Francis’ message also offered spiritual advice for a world struggling with the effects of climate change. “We need both hope and courage,” he wrote. “Humanity possesses the wherewithal to effect this change, which calls for a genuine conversion, individual as well as communitarian, and a decisive will to set out on this path.”

5. Pray every day. Even when it is hard.

“Pray without ceasing,” the Apostle Paul exhorts us in his letter to the Thessalonians. A worthy goal, to be sure. But maybe this year, you simply want to be able to pray a nightly Examen without falling asleep or pray a rosary without starting to go through your to-do list after one decade.

Pope Francis understands your struggle. “Praying is not something easy, and this is why we flee from it,” [he said on May 12](#). “Every time we want to pray, we are immediately reminded of many other activities, which at that moment seem more important and more urgent. This happens to me too!”

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[The next week](#), Pope Francis acknowledged the forces that can stand in the way of prayer: distraction, spiritual barrenness, sloth. All these, the pope

said, must be met with perseverance:

True progress in spiritual life does not consist in multiplying ecstasies, but in being able to persevere in difficult times: walk, walk, walk on.... and if you are tired, stop a bit and then start walking again.

If you are feeling discouraged about your progress in prayer, know that Pope Francis is struggling and walking right there with you—and do not give up!

6. Let go of a grudge or two.

Too often, it is the people we love (and see) the most who bear the brunt of our anger, frustration or pure exhaustion. So if you have found yourself sniping at your spouse or being short with your close friends, Pope Francis has some advice: Don't end the day angry.

"Listen to me well," [Pope Francis said in his Dec. 1 general audience](#). "Never finish the day end without making peace. 'We fought. My God, I said bad words. I said awful things. But now, to finish the day, I must make peace.' You know why? Because the cold war the next day is very dangerous."

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So whether it's a caress on your husband or wife's cheek, as the pope suggested, or a conciliatory text to a friend, do not let today's grudges fester till the morning.

7. Get off Twitter.

After the pandemic moved much of our lives online—YouTube Masses, Zoom happy hours, untold hours of Covid-19 doomscrolling on Twitter—you might be ready for a social media cleanse in 2022.

Pope Francis has repeatedly urged people to get off their smartphones and

to start communicating with the person in front of them. This year, in a message to journalists, [he again warned of "the tyranny of always being online"](#):

Listening always goes hand in hand with seeing, with being present: certain nuances, sensations, and well-rounded descriptions can only be conveyed to readers, listeners and spectators if the journalist has listened and seen for him- or herself. This means escaping—and I know how difficult this is in your work!—escaping from the tyranny of always being online, on social networks, on the web.

Even if you are not a journalist, you can take a page from our very offline pope and make 2022 a year filled with IRL conversation and friendship.

8. Call your loved ones regularly (and truly listen to them.)

"When was the last time we visited or telephoned an elderly person in order to show our closeness and to benefit from what they have to tell us?" That was Pope Francis' question in his [homily for the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly](#) on July 26.

Few groups have been more profoundly affected by the ongoing pandemic than our elders. Now that vaccines and boosters have made it possible to safely visit them, what if you took the next year to listen to or even record their stories and wisdom?

"Let us not lose the memory preserved by the elderly, for we are children of that history, and without roots, we will wither," the pope said. "They protected us as we grew, and now it is up to us to protect their lives, to alleviate their difficulties, to attend to their needs and to ensure that they are helped in daily life and not feel alone."