

Well 2016 is suddenly upon us – many of us are left wondering where 2015 went to. many of us will be glad to see the back of 2015 – maybe it has been a year of tragedy and bereavement. What lies ahead for 2016. It is a year of commemorations. As a nation we will be remembering the events of 1916, the Easter Rising and the events that followed. As a Parish community we will be remembering the 150th Anniversary of the building of this Church, not to forget the 200th anniversary of the tower of the Church. It will be a year of looking back to our past and looking forward to our future.

One feature of this transition from the old year to the new is the making of New Year Resolutions. What is it that we are doing when we make a New Year Resolution? At the heart of the whole procedure is that of identifying an aspect of our life that we need to sharpen up on - having done that we set a target that we would like to achieve.

There is how I see myself now, over and against how I would like to see myself in the future. The resolution is a strategy for closing that gap. What I want to do this morning is just to think a bit about closing gaps.

Of course all this raises the question:

How do I see myself? How do others see me?

Even subconsciously, we all project something of an image – there is the element of the spin doctor in all of us. We want folk to see us as confident, as caring, as efficient or whatever.

Those who know us best get to see behind that image that we project; they see us as we really are and hopefully love us as we really are. And of course the one that knows us best is God. In the words of the song, ‘He knows me better than I know myself.’

What does God see? God sees one made in his own image. I recall those words of Genesis; ‘God saw everything that he had made and it was very good.’ But then at the same time as God looks at me he sees that image impaired, distorted by sin. There is a gap between man as God intended and man as he is. What is the strategy for closing that gap?

It is here that our Gospel reading (which overlaps the Gospel that we read on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning) speaks to me.

‘Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God’ *John 1:13*

This touches at the very heart of what Incarnation, God coming as man in the person of Jesus, really means. Augustine, one of the giants of the early Church, wrote of Jesus ‘becoming like us so that we might become more like him’.

Going back to our talk of New Year Resolutions as a strategy for closing the gap between how our lives are and how we would like them to be, I just want to reflect on this business of Jesus becoming like us so that we might become more like him. What we have here is, on the one hand, what God has done in Christ and, on the other, my own response to this. Augustine made another comment that I often find myself going back to. He was one who had had his own inner struggle before he finally came to faith. He wrote; ‘God, who creates us without our help, cannot save us without our consent.’

With this in mind, could you please turn to page 361 of your prayer books (262 if you’re using the large print) and the section under the heading ‘Decision’. We started off talking about New Year Resolutions; these if you like are the resolutions made at Baptism and Confirmation.

The first three, which come under the heading of ‘dying to sin’, summarise the issues that we have to face in our lives, the root causes of that gap between the person I am and the person God intends me to be as one made in his image. I often remark to parents and godparents that these are not questions of people who have arrived, who have everything sorted; they are questions of people on a journey, the journey of a life time.

I reject the devil – but I need to grow in that rejection.

I renounce the deceit of evil – but it still has its hold on me.

I repent of my sins – but I am still weak.

I turn to Christ, I submit to Christ – but my submission is far from complete.

I come to Christ – but I still need to draw closer to my Lord.

Archbishop McAadoo, who ordained me for the curacy of Raheny & Coolock, used to talk of the Christian life as a process of ‘becoming what we are’.

To go back to our Gospel reading, ‘Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God’ John 1:13.

In the coming of Jesus, in his life, his teaching, his death and resurrection, I discover my calling as one made in the image of God, a child of my heavenly Father. What is to be the outworking of that calling? What is my place as one made in the image of God, as one discovering what it means to be a child of my heavenly Father? It must surely be to show something of God’s likeness, something of Christ’s love in this world in which we live.

2015 has seen its share of suffering – we have seen the ongoing pain of Iraq and Syria, the almost medieval cruelty of ISIS and the consequent massive movement of refugees the Mediterranean, that iconic picture of the body of a young child washed up on a Turkish beach, the acts of terror that brought down a plane in Sinai and death onto the streets of Paris. All this in addition to the

unexplained and unexplainable suffering as the result of natural disaster, of illness and death.

People very naturally ask why? How can we talk of the love of God is the face of all this. And we have no answers, no neatly packaged solutions, no all embracing biblical text that we can rattle off. But if we cannot give an answer, we can allow ourselves to be part of the healing of those who bear the brunt of the misery that confronts us in this world. As ones who have responded to God's love in Christ, we can show something of the love of God to those in need.

As the medieval mystic Teresa of Avila reminds us:

He has no hands but ours, no lips but ours, no feet but ours.

As ones made in the image of God, as children of our heavenly Father, let us resolve to offer ourselves as the hands, the lips, the feet of Christ to minister to this broken and hurting world.