

Homily (Solemnity of Mary Mother of God) – 1/1/2017

Resolutions do not guarantee results but it is hard to imagine results without resolutions. And so, people make New Year's resolutions. We know we can be better than we are. For running deep into the well springs of the human soul is the desire to transform ourselves.

You know if we never went to church, if we did not believe in God, we would still have a deep desire to transform ourselves. It is in the DNA of our soul. Isn't that the religion of weight watchers, with Oprah Winfrey as the spokesperson, transform your body. Isn't that the gospel of Marie Osmond and Nutra Systems weight loss program - lose that fat. Isn't that the teaching of all those exercise equipment ads. Every jogger you see is a missionary preaching the message to transform ourselves.

You know Mary the Mother of God had to transform herself. She had no script on how her life would go anymore than you or I know what 2017 holds. Look at the heart of the christian faith is the goal of transformation which must begin in this life. So, I do not understand why so many church goers do not take seriously New Year's resolutions. The whole Christian faith is based on resolutions which is another name for conversion.

If we spent one tenth the amount of time planning a new year's resolution that we spend for planning the Christmas holidays, we would keep our resolutions. Why don't we keep them?

Here are some steps to follow. The first goal in making a New Year's resolution is to set one you can keep. If you skip this first step, you will fall flat on your face. The second step is to make only one or two resolutions. You make too many and you set goals you cannot keep. Which leads to frustration and depression. And, the third step is to have strategies. Isn't that what Weight Watchers is a strategy to lose weight? Isn't that what Nutra Systems is a strategy to lose weight? Isn't that what the coach of the football teams do, provide strategies game plans on how to defeat their opponent? Can you imagine a football coach not providing his team with a game plan, a strategy for winning? You must be serious, not just sincere in wanting to change. What is your strategy?

And, the fourth step is to have a timeline for your resolution goals. You know in the business world a goal without a timeline is a dream. Have a timeline for your goals and resolutions. Where do you want to be not in a year but in a week, two weeks.

I say all this because polls show the number one New Year's resolution in America is not to lose weight nor is it to exercise. The number one resolution is to "To be a better person." That is wonderful but vague. How are you going to do it? The same could be said for the Catholic Church where today we pray for World Peace. Now Pope Francis in his letter does give strategies for World Peace which all lead back to Christ. But you might not have time to read that letter so you could condense it by saying the "Path to peace must travel the road of forgiveness." Can you imagine how many wars in the human family could be stopped if forgiveness was the strategy? Can you imagine how many wars in your own family would end if forgiveness was the strategy? And you know who knows this in a surprising way - Pope Francis. Before he was pope he was superior of a Jesuit community in Argentina. And these Jesuit priests rebelled against him. He refused to allow his priests to work among the poor, because it turns out, it was certain that these priests would be murdered. Still the priests rebelled and Francis left that local community for two years. He was personally hurt by his fellow priests. Eventually there was forgiveness and Francis was reinstated as superior.

The path to peace must travel the road of forgiveness. You want peace in your family, who do you need to forgive? Now you don't have to feel forgiveness to mean it. If we worship feelings we will never forgive anyone. Forgiveness means at least this: "You do not exclude a person from a place in your heart and you pray that God will love that person."

I had an experience of such forgiveness this past week. I visited Charleston, South Carolina. Charleston is a wonderful city especially in its historic area. I made it a point while in Charleston to visit and say a prayer outside the African Emanuel Methodist Episcopal Church. That is where inside that church on June of 2015 a young white man massacred nine black members of the church. Afterwards, while driving out of the city on I-25 West, I passed numerous highway billboards. One immediately caught my eye. It showed a picture of a huge black assault weapon, not a hunting rifle. And this black gun had a red bow on it. Only these words were on the billboard: "All I want for Christmas". I thought of the Charleston Church I

just prayed at, then a few miles later another Billboard with that huge black gun with the red bow. This time the words read, "Do you hear what I hear". Those words are from a Christmas hymn. I felt sad thought of the word Christ in the word Christmas printed beside the black gun with the red bow. But a mile or two later I saw this billboard that made me swallow hard; It read: "Thank You for Your Acts of Kindness," signed The African Emanuel Methodist Episcopal Church.

The path to peace must travel the road of forgiveness. On this New Year's Day, who do you resolve to forgive especially in your family?