

JANUARY 2016 CHECK-UP

My church bulletin offers “New Year’s Resolutions for Catholics.” Actually, these resolutions could apply to nice people in general.

Here are a few of those resolutions: “Pray more. Read Scripture. Sin less. Eat less. Spend less. Live more simply. ...”

Self-improvement is a great motivator at the start of a new year.

But the hook is this: We will never be “self-improved” enough.

As men and women of God, self-improvement is too small a measure for our anointed lives. For the Christ-centered life, self-improvement is not really much of a measure at all.

When I pour my attention into improving “me,” I cannot really hear the cry of the poor, or touch the flesh of the wounded, or pay attention to the narrative of the marginalized.

Nor would I want to get the smell of the sheep on my improved and shiny self.

This year Pope Francis offers not just Catholics but men and women everywhere to engage themselves in the Jubilee of Mercy. To actually do the deeds that restore the marginalized back into the circle of humanity, to call forth the dignity of every human person, and the dignity of all of creation.

To call forth the dignity of those who irk us. To call forth the dignity even of those who have sold themselves to the corruptions of power in its many insidious forms.

We live inescapably within circumstances and opportunities to reveal the good. Our work as maturing men and women of God is to discern the invitations offered to us at every turn.

My work is to pay fierce attention daily to my own circumstances and opportunities to reveal the good. To discern the invitations offered to me at every turn. Especially when the invitation requires my own change of attitude and conversion of heart.

Let’s go, each of us and all of us together, not timidly or safely, but courageously, boldly, into our world which yearns for light and grace and peace. Our world, which yearns for relief and beauty and unearned blessing and good.

In 2016 let’s give ourselves to the Revolution of Tenderness which Pope Francis has begun in our time. It is the same Revolution of Tenderness which was the mission of Jesus himself.

It is the one courageous mission which we call “revealing the reign of God.”

I wish you grace and peace and all good in 2016. You and your struggles, loves, and dreams are dearly in my prayer each day in the noon hour.

*Questions for reflection ...*

1. What circumstances and opportunities in my life urge me right now to “reveal the good”? What exactly does this rather large and vague phrase, “revealing the good,” mean for me?
2. How am I being invited, in real time and circumstance, to a change of attitude, a conversion of heart?
3. If I could write the story of this invitation to live a larger life with a larger heart, would this story be?

*What Mary Sharon is reading in these winter days ...*

- *All is Grace*, biography of Dorothy Day, by Jim Forest, who knew Day personally and was part of the Catholic Worker community in New York. A thoroughly researched and beautifully written book, with plenty of photos and insight into the prophetic effect Dorothy Day had on the world she inhabited and the church she challenged to justice and compassion.
- Poetry of Mary Oliver, a contemporary elder poet with a brilliant imagination. I have collected many of her volumes, and enjoy sharing her poetry with friends.