



*“And now let us believe in the year that is given to us, new, untouched, full of things that have never been, full of work that has never been done. ...”*

The dawning of a new year always reminds me of this quote from the letters of the popular Austrian poet, Rainer Maria Rilke. As Dec. 31 of one year flows into Jan. 1 of another, it is not difficult to muster a sense of hope and enthusiasm because we see a clean slate before us. While we might look back on the old year with a variety of mixed emotions—gratitude, regret, accomplishment or disillusionment—the new year is fresh and clean. With great optimism, we anticipate that life may be different, better.

As Rilke tells us, the new year is given to us but, to a certain extent, what it will become is up to us. Each of us needs to determine what we are willing to bring to this wonderful gift that is “new, untouched, full of things that have never been.” We must consciously choose what we will contribute to the project of creating a remarkable new year.

For many years, I taught at a Jesuit prep school and we frequently talked about what we wanted our graduates to look like at graduation: intellectually competent, loving, committed to justice, open to growth and religious. As I reflect on what is needed to make the new year different, better, I believe these are the very qualities that are desperately needed in our troubled world.

As we come to the new year, let us pray that we bring all of our intellectual gifts to the table that we might think clearly and decide wisely.

Let us pray to be loving persons, accepting of those who are different, and always wanting the very best for all of God's people.

Let us pray that we might be fully committed to bring about a just world, always conscious that, as John Kennedy said, "here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

Let us pray that we might be open to seeing reality with new eyes, understanding that change for the better is always a possibility.

And as we come to the new year, let us pray that we always remember that we are not alone. For as the Christmas season reminds us, the Son that has been given to us is Emanuel, God-with-us.

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