

DECEMBER 31, 2022--JANUARY 01, 2023 DEVOTIONAL

CALL TO A NEW YEAR: 1 PETER 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

PRAYER, BY FRANCES R. HAVERGAL, 1874

*Another year is dawning, dear Father, let it be
In working or in waiting, another year with Thee;
Another year of progress, another year of praise,
Another year of proving Thy presence all the days.*

*Another year of mercies, of faithfulness and grace,
Another year of gladness in the shining of Thy face;
Another year of leaning upon Thy loving breast;
Another year of trusting, of quiet, happy rest.*

*Another year of service, of witness for Thy love,
Another year of training for holier work above;
Another year is dawning, dear Father, let it be
On earth, or else in Heaven, another year for Thee.*

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: REVELATION 22:12

12 "See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

BLESSED THOUGHTS FOR A NEW YEAR

I miss the old Norwegian custom where, on New Year's Eve, the whole Nordland District gathered at one of the farmhouses for prayer and singing, after which the kids went sledding on the creek hills, or even skating on a farm pond, while the aunts and uncles and grandparents visited, and then everyone enjoyed lots of good Norwegian food. What a great way to transition from one year to the next, with my three favorites, prayer, friends and family--and food!

Anyway, I did decide to set aside some time for remembering and expectation. I wrote down a series of questions about the almost eighty years I've lived in. I'm adding my answers, but I encourage all of you to think about how you would answer these questions. I do so because I am totally convinced that God has some exciting challenges for his beloved saints in 2023, and maybe this little spiritual exercise will prepare us for them.

Question # 1: What is the earliest year I can remember?

For me it was July 1947, when my Mom got a store-bought cake for my 4th Birthday!

Question # 2: What was the best year of your childhood?

Probably the year I was in Grade Six! So many wonderful things happened that year. I got better at playing baseball. My teacher was the best ever (she really understood how to

teach boys). I joined boy scouts and fell in love with hiking and camping and got a lot of friends. Yes, in the words of the song, “it was a very good year.”

Question # 3: Which year brought the most changes to my life?

In 1969 everything changed when I left the USA and moved to Canada. In 2002 a lot more changed after I left full-time parish ministry and became a social worker and adult educator.

Question # 4: What was the scariest year I lived through?

I will never forget how Clarice and I watched the news around the clock during the first months of the pandemic! Can we ever forget the images of the mortuary trucks parked outside large city hospitals?

Question # 5: What was the hardest year to get through?

For me that was 1967, a year of utter darkness and depression—but also a year I started my recovery. By the Spring of 1968, I was working as a high school teacher, and as a librarian, until, on St. Patrick’s Day when I re-entered full-time ministry as a psychiatric hospital chaplain. Praise and glory to our healing God!

Question # 6: Which loved one have I most missed in this past year?

Our home congregation on All Saints’ Sunday encourages us to light a candle in memory of a loved one who is celebrating God with us in heaven. I told Pastor Michael that if I lit a candle for every loved one I’m still grieving, our church would need extra fire insurance. But of them all, now in the hands of God, I do miss my cousin Katherine who was not only the oldest Bence grandchild, but the very epitome of one tough, caring person who was also a force of nature! Rest in Peace, sweetheart!

Question # 7: Which year was I closest to God?

In my first parish everything was brand new: new wife, new children, new country, new life generally. It was easy to be close to God then, but as years roll around, and you experience so much human pain with your people, well, you change.

Question # 6: What did you most want to achieve in 2022?

My Life Plan which I have been faithfully following since 1999 listed my Greatest Aspiration for 2022 as “narrowing the distance between myself and God.” How did I do with this goal? I think that writing Sunday and midweek devotions for my parish and for LUM really helped me experience the Presence of God in challenging times.

Question # 8: What will I remember most about 2022?

There were a lot of good memories, but I think the best memory was my final service at St. Paul’s, with my grandchildren reading the scriptures in English and French and helping as communion assistants. It was time to walk off the stage there and get on with other things. I am so grateful for my time with those wonderful people.

Question # 9: What new thing would you like to experience in 2023?

I’d like to spend more time in other languages. My oldest grandchild can read both the Russian and Arabic alphabet, and I’m still just getting my feet wet with French! Most of all, I’d really like to lead worship again at The Urban!

Question # 10: Is there a good prayer for all of us as we receive 2023 into our lives?

A few Sundays ago we sang Hymn 814 in Sunday worship, a hymn from the Iona community in Scotland, written by John Bell:

Take, Oh, take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;

Set your seal upon my heart and live in me.

Your Challenge:

I've given you my responses to these ten questions to get you thinking, but this spiritual exercise will only help you if you take the time to search your own soul and jot down your "Blessed Thoughts" at the Turning of the Year. May it be a real blessing to you.

BLESSING: REVELATION 22:21

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

MUSICAL BLESSING: "TAKE, OH, TAKE ME AS I AM"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mf3QHqQ-004>

--written by an old guy who is very grateful for all those years!