Looking back, looking forward

Among the gods recognized by the ancient Greeks was Janus, after which our month of January takes its name. Janus was always represented by two faces, one looking forward and the other backward. So in January, our first month on the calendar, we naturally remember and reflect on the past while looking forward to what the New Year might hold for us.

When I think back on this year I remember people: new born babies who were baptized, young teens who claimed car keys, high school and college graduates, couples who were married, and sadly, a number of dear ones who departed this life. I see the concerned faces of parents who have sons and daughters serving in the armed forces. I remember the people who have battled illness, dependency, aging, and troubled relationships. I am reminded of the people who struggle with basic housing, health care, food, and employment problems.

All of this comes from the perspective of a pastor. No matter the faith community that we serve, pastors all are called to stand with and among people. Although our primary responsibility is for those in our own congregations, we also relate to and offer our support to many who are not technically part of “the flock”. It is such a privilege to share in the lives of people. So, as I look back on 2013, I think of people.

Speaking of people- TIME magazine recently named Pope Francis as the “Person of the Year”. Certainly as we look back on 2013, we will remember how the new pope has set a “people” tone for his ministry. Pope Francis has endeared himself to Roman Catholics and to all Christians for his embrace of a simple, humble lifestyle and his personal, often dramatic care for those dealing with challenge and trouble. He exemplifies the power of sacrificial love. Hopefully his example will inspire us all.

So now, we turn our gaze and welcome a new year.


Christianity is all about relationships: relationship with God in Christ Jesus and relationship with one another. As we resolve to begin anew, it would be well for each of us to “bark less, and wag more”. Any relationship which has meaning has been forged in times of challenge. Relationships require time and commitment. A relationship with God will be lived out in community.

The biblical metaphor for relationship is often expressed in “walking”. To have a relationship with God or with another person is to walk with them. How will you walk with God in the new year? How will you walk with others?
So the New Year begins. Let us greet 2014 with faith in Jesus Christ and with unshakeable trust that Christ will continue to walk with us. For whenever there are two or three of us together, he is in our midst.

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