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Happy New Year!

What do you want for your friends when you say, “Happy New Year!” Maybe you’re just happy to be alive. You’re ready for whatever the new year brings. Maybe the last few months were difficult because both you and your friend had a rough time, and you’re hoping things will work out better.

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Doesn't “Happy New Year!” mean that we would like a year free from pain, illness and death? Doesn't it

mean we hope business will be good, with half a chance that the taxman won't come knocking too hard on our door? Doesn't it mean we're looking forward to a year when thugs, pirates and terrorists will take a vacation? Doesn't it mean we might even expect some wonderful and unexpected thing to happen that will make us really happy for as long as we live?

There's nothing explicit in the Gospel about celebrating the new year. Instead it speaks about something more impressive than a mere wish for better times. As the prophets of the Old Testament said, when describing the Messiah, the Christ was destined to enter the world and announce to all peoples of all times: "Behold, I make all things new ... I am going to create new heavens and a new earth. The past will not be remembered; it will no longer come to mind." Indeed, when the Christ did

appear among us, he proclaimed solemnly: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will never pass away.”

Jesus came to redeem us. He came do something even more wonderful. He came to change everything. He came not only to save us from sin but also to “free the whole of creation from its slavery to corruption” and give it the “same glorious freedom as the children of God”.

It's good to make new year's resolutions. Jesus invites us to seek virtue: doing our work well, being humble as he was humble, treating others with patience and kindness, learning to forgive as we are forgiven and doing good for those who hate us. Even so, Christian life is defined not only by what we can do to improve. It depends on God doing great things for us.

It may sometimes seem that God has no intention of doing any great thing. It may sometimes seem that, from the beginning of creation until now, nothing has changed because nothing will ever change. When such thoughts crowd in on your weak faith, turn to Jesus. Remember that he calls himself “the Amen, the faithful witness”. It means that we can trust him. It means that he will fulfil all his promises and make us happy beyond our wildest dreams.

This article by Fr. Joe Babendreier first appeared in the Sunday Nation in December 2013.

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