

A Pearl of Great Price

It has become a tradition in my family that my sister-in-law gives me a diary for Christmas. It's a comfortingly familiar experience to receive this gift and to open up the first fresh pages of a new year. But what does all this talk of a 'new' year really mean?

Over the break we probably saw some of the media focuses on 'the year that's been' and some of us committed ourselves, privately or publically, to some kind of 'new year resolution'. We might have tried to think about the year as a whole, judged it to be 'good' or 'terrible' or felt 'glad it's over'; we might have been looking forward to the year ahead or worried about what it might bring. Whatever our feelings about this time of year, as we take down the 2013 calendars and begin to plot our course for 2014 we are confronted by a signpost in time; a marker of movement between the past and the future.

In the last weeks of December I had a list of all the things I needed to do and all the people I needed to see before Christmas. If you were a visitor from another planet it may have looked as though it was not merely the end of the year but the end of life itself!

There is certainly a sense of finality that accompanies the Old Year-New Year time of transition. Whether real or perceived the prospect of one year ending and another beginning usually prompts us to reflection, and from reflections to resolution.

Finality helps us recognize what really matters.

However popularized and commodified the practice of NY resolutions, I still hear people speaking of committing themselves to the things of life; of what is good and real and what promises genuine freedom.

A couple of years ago I met a man who told me that he had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and couldn't expect to live much more than a year. After being encouraged by friends and family to 'go on a cruise', to travel, see the world, etc. he said that it was at this point he realized that his simple life in his small community was all that he desired. And it was there, in the midst of all that was familiar to him, that he made his stand. Finality revealed to him what really mattered. It revealed to him what was precious. In one sense everything remained the same. In another sense life had become utterly different.

If 2014 was our last year, what would be our resolutions?

This year I have resolved to *enjoy* my children. Most of our time is spent organizing, managing, containing, mediating, tidying-up and telling-off. There is a seemingly endless 'to-do' list. The New Year offers a wonderful opportunity to mine that list for the one or two precious things upon which we will make our stand. It is the chance to search and find our 'pearl of great price'.

Happy hunting in 2014!

With every blessing and best wish for the year ahead

James