

8 (Spiritual) New Year's Resolutions for Catholics

By Gretchen Filz

January is here again, and it's time to make the annual New Year's resolutions. Every Catholic should add to their list a few spiritual resolutions designed to help them walk higher up that mountain of faith. Let the freshness of a new year be your impetus to make new strides in your walk with God! There is no better time but the present! Here are some ideas.

1. Increase Your Marian Devotion

2017 marked the 100th anniversary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to three shepherd children at Fatima, Portugal. In this most prophetic of all Marian apparitions, Our Lady of Fatima made urgent pleas for mankind to reform themselves and pray her rosary daily, along with other grave messages and warnings with dire consequences for the entire world. Her messages were then authenticated on October 13, 1917 with an undisputed public miracle of biblical proportions, when an estimated 70,000 people were gathered to witness what became known as the Miracle of the Sun.

However, Our Lady's pleas were not heeded, and the last century has seen a widespread loss of Christian faith, breakdowns in marriages and families, and a rejection of basic morality. This affects all of us, and, as a result, anxiety and depression have risen to epidemic levels. The way to turn back to God is the same way that God came to us—through the Blessed Mother. In 2019, commit yourself to increasing your Marian devotion so that she may lead you to deeper conversion, to follow God's will for your life more perfectly, and to increase your faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

2. Make more time for spiritual reading

The brilliant St. Athanasius once said,

"You will not see anyone who is striving after his advancement who is not given to spiritual reading. And as to him who neglects it, the fact will soon be observed in his [lack of] progress."

If you want to make progress in your walk with God in 2019, spiritual reading should be high on your list. Your best bet is to stick to the classics written by Catholic saints known for their practical spiritual wisdom—such as Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, Therese of Lisieux, and John of the Cross. There are also audio books available for many classic Catholic titles. The four Gospels and the letters of St. Peter and St. Paul are also excellent choices for reading, being the very inspired Word of God.

If you struggle with finding the time to read, make a list of books that you'd like to complete in 2019 and pray that God will show you how you can find the time to read them. Maybe it will mean cutting out TV time or slimming back on unnecessary social activities. The time you spend feeding your soul is time better spent.

3. Make good stewardship a lifestyle

Pope Francis has often spoken of the dangers of materialism. This boils down to one key concept in the life of the Christian: practicing good stewardship over the gifts God has given us. This means good management of our "time, talent, and treasure" for the greater glory of God. As Jesus warned us in his parables, all of his servants will be judged on how they used the graces he gave them. Do we neglect them and spend them selfishly, or are we generous in building up God's kingdom on earth? Prayerfully evaluate how you will spend your time, your talents, and your income in 2019 to see what lifestyle changes you can make that will positively impact your spiritual life. Make it big. God cannot be outdone in generosity!

4. Share your Catholic faith with others

With so many people far away from God today (and with more and more people noticing it), the culture is ripe for evangelism. There is a palpable hunger for God and his truth. Modern Catholics aren't usually great about sharing their faith with others, but this is something that can change with practice. You don't have to be

obnoxious or overbearing about your faith, just focus on doing simple things like being joyful in your walk with Christ or inviting people to come to Mass with you. Another good idea is to buy some sacramentals in bulk, get them blessed, and hand them out to people as the Holy Spirit leads. If someone you know is going through a difficult time and you hand them a Miraculous Medal or a prayer card out of a stash you always keep handy, it might be for them the touch of God in that moment.

5. Bring back regular penances

Living a penitential life, even outside of Advent and Lent, is the Catholic way of life. All of the Church's saints performed penances habitually, either internally or externally, great and small, for themselves and for others. Many do not know that the Fridays outside of Lent are also days of abstinence and fasting. While the Church law against eating meat on the Fridays outside of Lent was lifted by the U.S. bishops, it is meant to be substituted with some other form of penance in order to continue to give special reverence to the day of the week on which Our Lord died on the cross. What penitential practice can you do each Friday in 2019? Maybe it is tried-and-true abstinence from meat on Fridays throughout the year (not only Lent), or perhaps another penitential practice such as praying the Stations of the Cross, or even acts of service for the less fortunate. Be creative. Remember that penances aren't meant to be pleasant at first, but the graces that come from them grow sweeter with time.

6. Go an extra day to Mass

Mass is not only the source and summit of our faith, it is the source and summit of our very life. For 2019, think of ways you can arrange your schedule and activities so you can make it to Mass either an extra day each week, or a few extra days a month. If you have trouble with this due to a packed schedule, pray and ask Our Lord to help you find the time. Maybe it will involve switching a travel route, or leaving for work an hour early, skipping lunch, or missing a regular Saturday morning activity for one Saturday a month. Check all the parishes in your area and their Mass times and see what can be done, and remember that daily Masses are usually only 30 minutes long. If still impossible with your schedule, find out when your local parishes keep their doors open, and try to add time for Adoration outside of Mass, even if just for 15 minutes.

7. Pray the rosary

No Catholic list of New Year's resolutions would be complete without a daily rosary added in. If you already pray the rosary daily, that is fantastic. Your resolution can then be to spread devotion to the rosary in 2019. There are many ways you can do this. You can purchase inexpensive rosaries in bulk, get them blessed, and hand them out as the opportunity arises. You can also invite others to pray the rosary with you, teach others how to pray it, or encourage those who don't pray it daily to do so. Tell them about Our Lady's promises to those who pray the rosary. Maybe they don't know that the rosary is a spiritual weapon that will help them fight all their personal battles. If your parish doesn't have a regular time set aside for the faithful to come together to pray the rosary, for example before or after Mass on any given day, start it up in 2019.

8. Pick a new saint buddy

Why not begin the tradition of walking along your pilgrimage of faith with a different Catholic saint each year? There are so many of them with unique graces to bestow. Pray about your New Year and the goals you have for your spiritual life, your family, your relationships, your career, etc. Then choose a patron saint whose virtues you would like to emulate in New Year, and entrust your year to their special intercession. This is a great way to guard against the typical two-week lifespan of New Year's resolutions; with a new saint by your side praying for you, it will be a lot harder for your goals to slip away. There may be a particular saint whom you already admire, but to whom you have never prayed or had a devotion. Ask this saint to be your guide for 2019.