

New Year's Day, 2010

Good morning. Welcome to the first homily of the New Year!

People have all kinds of traditions around the New Year. The Duffell family spent its usual quiet New Year's Eve together last night, working on our traditional 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle. This year's puzzle is a picture of lots of different kinds of candy. When I left home this morning it was on the dining room table, about 85% finished. We'll probably finish it off before the day is done.

The Church has traditions around New Year's too. And so today we celebrate the feast day of Mary, Mother of God, and our gospel restates part of the Christmas story, adding the story of what happened a week later, when Mary and Joseph gave their baby the name Jesus. Not only that, since 1968 New Year's Day has also been observed by the Catholic Church as the World Day of Prayer for Peace, and every year since then the Pope has issued a New Year's message of Peace; this year's message was the 43rd such message. I looked up the last fifteen or so, and they each highlight a different aspect of peace, a message not, as you might think, specific to any particular war or conflict but something nonetheless fitting for the times. And so last year, after the world financial meltdown took place in late 2008, the 2009 message was fittingly devoted to Fighting Poverty as a path to peace. Other years' topics included the pursuit of Truth (2006), the dignity of the Human Person (2007), and Teaching Peace (2004). The title of the peace message on the New Year after 9/11 was **"No Peace Without Justice; No Justice Without Forgiveness."**

Pope Benedict's focus for this year's message is the Environment, and the title of this year's message is **"IF YOU WANT TO CULTIVATE PEACE, PROTECT CREATION."** Right in his very first paragraph, Benedict points out that the preservation of the environment has become essential for the peaceful coexistence of all people. I invite you to take a look at the whole message yourself; there's a brown paper flyer at the main entryway that was developed by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, and there's also a handy link to the pope's entire message on the home page of our parish web site, at www.stbridgetchurch.org.

In his message, Benedict reminds us the earth belongs to humanity as a whole and to generations yet to come; that all of creation is a gift from God to all people; and that we have a duty to act as responsible stewards of this great gift.

The pope cautions that technologically advanced societies – such as ours – must be prepared to encourage “more sober lifestyles, while reducing energy consumption. He calls for a “world-wide redistribution of energy resources, so that countries lacking those resources might have access to them.” Finally, he ends by reminding us that “the real motivation for dealing with our ecological

problems must be the quest for authentic world-wide solidarity, inspired by the values of charity, justice, and the common good.”

It’s a good message – a good way to begin the year.

And my having said that raises one more tradition, which is not just a Church tradition. This New Year 2010, like any new year, is a chance for a new start – it’s a good time for resolutions. So I’d like to suggest to you something inspired by our first reading today: that you might make the resolution to bless those who are close to you. Bless them today, and tomorrow, and the next and the next; bless them often. Joan’s father still does that today, to all family members when they’re about to travel anywhere. It might feel a little awkward to do this if you never have done it before, but you can at least begin with a blessing in your heart. When you see your child, or your grandchild, or anyone you love, say, “The Lord bless you.” Or when you’re saying goodbye, make that goodbye also a blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you.” Little by little, you can extend that blessing to others: those you work with, your friends, people you meet as you go about your daily business. Your blessing will help them – and it will also help you.

So in keeping with that spirit, I would like to conclude with the blessing Moses taught to his brother Aaron, in today’s First Reading:

May the LORD bless you and keep you!
May the LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!
May the LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!

Deacon Denny Duffell, January 1, 2010