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### Next Year

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## Next Year

We regularly celebrate anniversaries and birthdays; we commemorate special events; on January 1 we begin a new year. The dates appear on a calendar as occurrences; they do not make us older or better. But these designated times do provide us with opportunities for reflecting on the quality of our lives.

Birthday card racks are filled with not-so-funny negative jokes about ageing. And, while the New Year is usually depicted as being filled with opportunity, the previous year is imaged as being decrepit and useless. If the passing of years is considered "bad news," the next year would seem to have little possibility of being better.

But the passage of days, weeks, and months does nothing, positive or negative. All the dates that appear on our calendars – for anniversaries, significant holidays, family gatherings, and memorials – are occasions for some response or action on our part. The choices we make give meaning and value to life, and provide cause for celebration. The mere passage of time has no significance for us.

We have the capability and responsibility to interpret and evaluate what we do and what we observe. Those who find meaning in their struggles and joys can look ahead into the next year with a perspective of sincere hopes and desires for what lies ahead, both for themselves and for others too.

The greetings we give, from "Happy Anniversary" and "Happy Birthday" to "Happy New Year," are gifts of hope that we can give to others, not mere wishes. We are not able to offer or guarantee future health or happiness to anyone, but we can convey our present care for the persons we greet. Whether or not we tell them about our intent, we can easily combine our expressions of concern with the added value of our entrusting them to God's guidance and care.

We "bless" people whenever we desire for them peace, happiness, or a life worth living. We all go forward one day at a time, just as we did in living through the previous 365 days. If we see ourselves and others as active participants in a life that comes from God as a gift, and leads back to God as our gift in return, we are both reasonable and loving in congratulating people on the annual events we commemorate, and on whatever lies ahead in the next year.

The significance of our greetings will be the greater as we take some time to reflect on at least a few of the details of the past year. If we wish someone a "Happy Birthday," we will be able to convey some real hope for the future if we consider one or more choices the person made in the last twelve months that manifested the presence of God. For a child who has taken on some age-appropriate responsibility, we can readily imagine and pray for his or her continuing maturation. For a cancer patient, we might call to mind that person's courage, which we reverence and support as an ongoing positive choice.

For us, the New Year is not a replacement for a worn-out set of days, but a continuation of choosing an attitude and manner of living that befit children of God. We can look back, and find some signs of cooperation with the Spirit of God, and prayerfully hope for more of the same for anyone and everyone we greet, think of, or care about. Rather than being spectators, we are actors; God has been our Director during the last year, and will be during the next year.

Happy New Year.