

## **A New Year, Full of Possibilities**

By: Mark Roock

January 2, 2011. A new year is full of possibilities. All of us have experienced transitions in the past year, and there are transitions ahead of us in 2011. In his sermon today, Mark Roock asks us to consider the mission to which God is calling us, as individuals and as a congregation, to help God's plan come to fulfillment.

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

Well, just five weeks ago we started a new church year, a year of grace, with the season of Advent. And we were anticipating the birth and the coming and the fulfillment of God's promise of a messiah. And then with Christmas, just nine days ago, we celebrated the birth of the Christ. And we are still in that season of Christmas. And yet overlaid with that celebration are other festivals that the church observes. On December 26th, the Feast of Saint Stephen, who cared for people and gave his life -- stoned to death, one of the first martyrs of the church. Then on December 27th we honor St. John, Apostle and Evangelist, the gospel writer of today's gospel lesson. And on the 28th of December, so last Tuesday, we celebrated the Holy Innocents as martyrs. These were the young boys killed at the order of Herod, who wanted to assure that there were no boys in Bethlehem who might be the new king -- because after all, the wise men hadn't returned to give him the identity of the person, of the child that they had visited who was to be king of the Jews. And then yesterday, the New Year was also the eighth day of Christmas and the day we celebrate the name of Jesus. Because in Jewish tradition, on the eighth day the son was brought to the temple to be circumcised and to receive his name. And the name this child received was the name the angel had given and that Mary and Joseph had said he should receive: Jesus, which means "the Lord will save."

Now I don't know about you, but in our house on January 1 we hang up a new calendar. We take down one calendar and hang up a new one. So for us, a new calendar year of course has begun as well. But it strikes me that this really is a time of transitions, a time of change. All of us have experienced transitions in the past year in different forms. Some of us became engaged, some were married, some had a child for the first time, or some were blessed with a grandchild or a great-grandchild. Some had to change jobs, either because of necessity or because they saw different opportunities, and felt a leading and a calling that would lead them to a new opportunity. Some entered retirement. Some had to experience the fracture of relationships. Some entered school for the first time, and some matriculated to other levels of schooling, including college and graduate studies. In all of these ways, transitions took place. Some lost loved ones and long to be reunited with them in heaven. Some transitioned from independent living to assisted living, some to skilled nursing care. Some transitioned into heaven. All of life's transitions mean change. And change can be challenging -- sometimes very challenging.

Think of the Israelites, who were about to leave exile after having been in exile for several hundreds of years. Now they were to return to their homeland, the land of promise. But this generation had not been there, so for them this was an undertaking almost as large as the exile itself or as the first coming to the promised land. What would it be like? What will await us there? What will we face? It is difficult sometimes to give up the things you know and have perhaps become comfortable with, and to venture out into something that is new. But that potentially holds great promise for you. So I have experience that moving forward and going forward, taking that one step at a time that leads you perhaps on a path that you have envisioned -- but also perhaps on a path that you could not have imagined -- that taking

that step is in itself an act of faith.

It is an act of faith because we believe. We believe in God's faithfulness. We believe in the trustworthiness of God, that he will fulfill his promise even if sometime we look at it and we say, "Man, this is screwed up. How can this possibly happen?" Yet God has a way of breaking down the walls we erect for our worlds, for what we imagine to be best for us. God has a way of breaking down those walls because he calls us to new ventures, and to get beyond the walls, to experience the more that is out there. As I get older too, I'm more and more convinced, or more and more experiencing I should say, that I recognize how little I know. And I've thought a long time, and you know early in my life I've kind of felt I know a lot. I've gone through college. I've gone through seminary. I know a lot. But our experiences over life teach us how little we do know and how much we must rely on God. We believe. We believe in God's trustworthiness, that he will fulfill the promise.

Now our lessons say today that God has a plan. And the plan is that he will gather up all things in heaven and all things on earth under him. The question is then how will we contribute to the fulfillment of God's plan? What can I do to make that happen? After all, God's love has been so great for us. After all he says, "You are mine. I have called you." We have become, under Jesus Christ, through God's grace, children of God -- sisters and brothers to our Savior, Jesus Christ. So in response to that, we ask what can I do? What can I do in response to your great love for me? I don't have that answer for you. I don't even always have that answer for myself. But I do recognize that because God is trustworthy and that because God is faithful, it behooves us to assure that we have opportunities to communicate with him, to pray, to read the scriptures, to consider what he has in store for us, to ask that question continually. What is the mission to which God is calling me? And as a congregation, what is the mission to which God is calling us?

A new year is full of possibilities. There are transitions ahead of us that we may contemplate and be planning, and there may be transitions ahead of us in this twelve-month period that we know nothing about. Yet this faithful God is with us. Remember Jesus' words: "I am with you always, even to the end of the ages." So as we experienced transitions, we can be assured that God is with us, there to sustain us, there to help us. Sometimes it happens in the way of friends and counselors and others. Sometimes in what I term is angels unawares: people perhaps I've met for the first time, but whose kind word or whose kind deed have helped me, and have pointed me again to give thanks to this great God.

So as we enter the rest of 2011, I encourage you to go with God, to keep him in your hearts, to come to him in prayer, to receive his body and blood in the sacrament, to recognize the opportunities you have in ways small and great, to help God's plan come to fulfillment.

Amen.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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