

A New Year's Evaluation

It's hard to believe it's time to take down the old familiar calendar filled with Church feast days, the girls' activities, everyone's doctor appointments, and personal activities and put up a new clean one.

Whatever 1996 was like, you can improve 1997 by examining the past year. Take a few minutes to look back on your year and plan some strategy for the new one. Before you read on, locate paper and pen.

1. What went right in 1996?

Even in a bad year some good things happen! List all the things you believe were a success. Did you get to know God better? Did you spend more time with your family than in 1995? Did you see an improvement in a relationship with a friend or coworker? Did you make it through a tough year with a hard-to-get-along-with boss? Did you make your spouse (or a friend) happy by thoughtful gestures? Anything you consider to be a success (no matter how small) counts! List at least ten things before reading step two.

2. What went wrong in 1996?

It usually doesn't take long to come up with a list for this one. But don't dwell on it. List no more than the top ten for the year. Now examine your list. Are they failures, or are some of them things you could do nothing about? Did some of them happen because you took on more than you should have? Could you be expecting too much from yourself?

Anyone who's never failed hasn't attempted much! What makes the difference is how we handle failure. Remember Judas and Peter? Both failed miserably during Christ's last earthly hours. Judas hanged himself when he realized his error. But Peter dealt with his failure, repented of his sin, and went on to do great things for the Lord.

3. How did I handle failure in 1996?

Failure is painful. But it's necessary to teach us a particular truth. Imagine how Peter could speak of God's love after he had been forgiven for denying Christ three times! As hard as it may be for us to believe, many of the saints saw themselves as the worst of sinners. They knew the love of God and where they fell short.

Take a look at the list you made in the last section. How did the real failures affect you? Did you pray to God asking His help in facing the pain of failure? Did you ask Him to forgive you through the sacrament of confession? Did you pick up and go on, putting your mistake behind you?

Or did you get discouraged and doubt your abilities or selfworth? Did you feel that God must be disgusted with you because you've messed up so many times? Did you cut off your relationship with Him because you were ashamed?

When we fail God, often those failures bother us most of all. And yet God is more ready to forgive than any of our human peers. Go over your list of failures one last time. Meditate on each one, giving it to God as you go along. If you need to speak with your parish priest about an issue, do so. Seek forgiveness through the Church. Then obliterate it from the list. Now look at 1997 with a clean record!

4. What can I do to improve 1997?

Look again at the first list you made. Think about *why* those good things happened. You can probably determine some things you did which would be smart to repeat in 1997. You can also think of some things that you should/could have done, but didn't. Perhaps reading about the Orthodox faith, praying more, participating in the Eucharist more often, fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays and during the Lenten seasons. The Orthodox Church has many "tools" to help us build our spiritual life. Write those things down.

Now decide how you're going to handle failure. Remember that it can sometimes be prevented by not expecting too much of yourself. Write down your plan of attack. Look at your list and plan of attack, and prayerfully set a few reasonable goals for yourself. Make them reachable, but not too easy.

Remember to periodically check how you're doing. And if you fail, give God a chance to get you going again. He's always ready to hear our prayers. He wants to help, and He doesn't fail!

If your children are in third grade or older, this would be a good exercise to do with them. The list can be shorter for each of the four questions, perhaps focusing on only one or two points. What is important is to help our children realize that with God's help they can change, be forgiven, and start anew! Our Lord is there to guide us - parents and children alike! Our children need to know that we parents look to God, we need Him, too!

Wishing you New Year filled with God's continued blessings for you and your family.

Adapted by Phyllis Meshel Onest from an article by Paul Woods, an associate editor of youth publications at the David C. Cook Publishing Co.

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