

Column

Janus is believed by many to be the oldest of the gods worshiped by the ancient Romans. He was believed to look after doors and gateways, which included the gate leading into the future – the New Year. Understandably, the Romans called the first month of the year *Januarius*, that designation, of course, remains down to the present day. We still call the first month, ‘January’.

In ancient statuary, Janus was often depicted as having two faces. Each looked in opposite directions – one back to the past, the other forward to the future. If you think about it, this double viewing is what we do at the beginning of each new year.

As we look back at 2023, we find, as with all years, it has had its blessings and challenges. On the positive side, fears surrounding the Covid pandemic have subsided, and life has returned to near normal despite periodic outbreaks of certain strains of the virus. Also, in recent weeks gas prices have taken a downward turn.

On the negative side, hatred, strife and hostilities have dominated the international scene. In early October, war broke out in the Middle East. Over 22,000 Palestinians and Israelis have been killed. How this conflict will end no one is sure.

Meanwhile, no resolution appears to be in sight in a military confrontation between Russia and Ukraine that began Feb. 24, 2022. More than 10,000 civilians have been killed, with another 18,500 injured.

Apart from military conflicts, a series of earthquakes Feb. 6 took Turkey and Syria by surprise. Over 55,000 people died in that region with another 100,000 injured. The rebuilding of lives and structures continues.

The negative events of 2023 have caused some to wonder if our Lord's Second Coming may be near at hand. Of course, there is nothing new about such speculations. For the past 2000 years, especially in times of political upheaval and in the face of calamitous natural disasters, people have looked to the eastern sky and asked, "Is this the time?"

A sober Christian response to trouble and perplexity is not to lay down our tools and seek to escape from this world and its trouble but to get on with the many tasks God gives us day by day. To live in expectation – yes – but not let religious entrepreneurs with their sensational predictions get us off course from our God-appointed mission.

What 2024 will bring we don't know. What we do know is that God is in control and that we are in His hands. That is enough.

Many make resolutions at the beginning of a new year. If you are one of these, by all means, keep them simple: Be kind, be generous with praise and stingy with criticism and be a bearer of the good news about the One whose birthday we have just celebrated. You can't go wrong with these.

The faces of Janus look both backward and forward. We turn with the latter resolved to go forward with God.

Almighty and most merciful God, grant, we beseech thee, that by the indwelling of thy Holy Spirit, we may be enlightened and strengthened for thy service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

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