

# COLUMNISTS

## Welcoming year 2000 with gratitude

I had a great holiday. I connected with very many wonderful people in lovely settings. I received cards from friends I hear from only at holiday time, and enjoyed that very much. I was a guest at the homes of the most hospitable people on this planet, I'm sure.

I received loads of presents, their usefulness and meaning ranging all the way from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Like everyone, I breathed a great sigh of relief that Y2K had been managed, and that the threats the media told us were real, weren't. I absolutely loved media coverage of the worldwide welcome of the New Millennium, which made me more conscious than ever that those of us living on this planet really can be connected in wonderful, positive and wholesome ways.

As I face the return to "ordinary time" this morning, I'm aware that a big chore ahead of me is writing a score of thank-you notes. My mother was always the chief enforcer of the importance of these notes, and my childhood was marked by her refusal to accept excuses for not sending them. This tyranny endured even after my 50th birthday, when most people might be expected to have grown beyond the need for such supervision!

But I suspect that the expression of thanksgiving is in truth one of the basic



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By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

attitudes and gestures of human life, and should never be taken lightly. Gratitude and thanksgiving are fundamental human responses to life's many gifts. In fact, gratitude and thanksgiving are two of the primary signs of human self-transcendence, our ability and need to go outside of and beyond ourselves in order to grow into full human beings.

Deep inside us is a "built-in" sense that we cannot really complete ourselves. Deep within us is the perception that our very being is a gift. As we mature, we become more and more aware of the sense that much of life is a very contingent and provisional matter, and that we are enormously dependent on the favor of others, on good fortune, certainly on the Giver of life itself.

In fact, Christianity itself seems built on the perception of an invitation to a

relationship with the One who is the Giver of life. The whole dynamic of the Christian religion turns on the realization that God is the giver of all good gifts, the initiator of the relationship into which we are invited; and we are called to respond in freedom to the invitation.

As people called to respond to such a profound invitation, our central attitude and core spiritual stance can be expressed precisely in terms of "thanksgiving." I suppose that explains why we have traditionally used the Greek term for thanksgiving, Eucharist, as a designation for our understanding of what is for us our central sacramental experience. It is in our response of thanksgiving offered to God that we experience and express the reality that it is this Other who creates, redeems and sanctifies us. Our role is to respond as grateful recipients to such infinite and such undeserved care.

We might even go so far as to say that gratitude ought to be the basic orientation of our life. Even if we labor under life's capricious nature and the contingency that marks our existence, we are still able because of God's goodness to us to transform this uncertainty and lack of control into a response in love to the One who has first loved us. We are able to love God and one another "until he comes again" in spite of the troubling

parts of life, precisely because God has first loved us.

Expressing thanks to one another is part of all this, too, since God is present in and through each one of us. In fact, it is through the love of others for us that we experience God's love. Christmas gifts and the gracious favors of the holiday season are appropriately seen, I think, as little signs of the great graciousness of God.

The basketball player Larry Bird was quoted recently as saying, after he had played against Michael Jordan for the first time, "God was on the court tonight, in the form of Michael Jordan." I don't pretend to know much about the way the divine is present in sports arenas, but I think that quote gives us a hint about how we might think of the goodness we have experienced because of one another during this holiday season. This can help us connect the many gifts of life with the Giver who comes to us through beautiful religious feast days, through welcoming a new millennium together, through reconnecting with friends and family, through enjoyment of relaxing moments spent together as winter gets underway.

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## Because God Loves You...

### **You never stand alone.**

There is someone with you in anxious moments who knows your deepest desires and wants what's best for you. Think of the person who has loved you most. Multiply that love a million times over and you still haven't reached the extent of God's personal love for you.

### **You can go beyond yourself.**

You can forgive those who have hurt you, however deeply. Even when you feel intense pain, the possibility of forgiveness lies within you. You can forgive others because God is always ready to forgive your sins. You can overlook wrongs because God empowers you to go beyond your own heartache.

### **You can ask forgiveness of those you have hurt.**

You can admit wrongs and ask forgiveness to make relationships right. His grace can heal you.

### **You can care for the weak.**

You can remove injustices, alleviate poverty, annihilate oppression and restore righteousness in our world. The love of God in you gives you strength to defend the unborn, support the elderly, and lift the hearts of those without hope. God's grace in you helps you to see that in every person beats a heart yearning to be loved.

### **You have the power to touch hearts with compassion.**

You can heal wounds in those around you and act selflessly.

New possibilities lie before you—before all of us—at the start of the third Christian millennium. This is a Jubilee Year of Celebration. This is a time to look at the world and decide how to better serve your neighbor. Thanks to God you can do it! Two thousand years ago the Father sent Jesus his son into the world as the Savior. Now through the Holy Spirit, the power of God's love lies within you.

## The Power of God's Love Lies Within You.

**WITH THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR 2000, OUR CHURCH EMBARKS ON A GREAT JUBILEE YEAR JOURNEY.**

Every quarter century Catholics celebrate a "holy year," in which we turn to Jesus, ask for the grace that converts our hearts and minds, and look forward in hope. As we celebrate the two thousand years of Christianity, we wish to witness to our faith in Jesus and how the Gospel empowers and challenges us.

As we think about home and school, work and play, we see a need for the saving presence of Jesus Christ throughout the land. This is vital as violence threatens to shatter peace and the lure of instant gratification keeps people from looking beyond themselves. Such threats can blind a person to the existence of God's timeless caring and affection.

As you step across the threshold into the new millennium, think about what God's love means for you.



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER FOR THE JUBILEE YEAR 2000

Kids' answers from page 12: *Jonah Isaiah Ezekiel Jeremiah Job*