

Happy New Year Brothers.

It's that time of the year again that traditionally we look back on the year we just finished and look forward to a brand new year along with our so-called "resolutions" to do better. And as I say that I am struck by how much that sounds similar to the Sacrament of Reconciliation! When speaking of Reconciliation the author Matthew Kelly points out in his book "Rediscover Catholicism" that the process of identifying our past weaknesses and turning them into future strengths is classic Catholic spirituality.

This year before I made my New Year's Resolutions I looked back. I started with last year's meditations for this Council. I looked at some of the titles: Angels; High Tech; Miracles. OK; I vaguely remember the titles, but exactly what I said I couldn't remember. I had to re-read them. Then I remembered that the point, for example, of Angels was that we need to be Angels for each other, to be Messengers of God and give counsel and guidance to others. High Tech was about how we evolve with our understanding of God and unfortunately tend to only get closer to Him during times of crises. Miracles centered on extending ourselves in the relief of distress of others. Nice themes. But I hadn't remembered them. I realized I had thought the thoughts; but had I walked the walk?

Speaking of having one foot in last year and the other foot in next year, I am reading a book by William Manchester and Paul Reid on Winston Churchill entitled "The Last Lion." Churchill was, in many ways, a thoroughly Victorian gentleman. But he also was firmly planted in the realities of his present day.

This book is actually the last of Manchester's trilogy on Churchill. Unfortunately, after finishing the first two masterful works, Manchester's wife passed away and he became depressed and suffered a stroke. He was not really able to write again and had asked Paul Reid to finish the series. I think there is a message there about how deeply dependent we are on each other.

Although Churchill claimed to be agnostic, he not infrequently used "God" in his speeches. One of his most memorable scenes filmed was his sitting next to Franklin Roosevelt on a naval vessel singing "Onward Christian Soldiers."

Although still in dispute, Churchill was probably bipolar. He would speak of his depressed periods as his "black dog." But he used something that was negative in his life and turned it into a remarkable positive. By the sheer force of his flowery and forceful oratory he rallied a nation to not surrender and, alone, fight the onslaught of Nazi military power. He succeeded. Although England did not win the war, more importantly they did not lose it and soon the tide of war turned against Nazi Germany.

Churchill once shared the standard to which he held himself: he said that every night he examined his day and asked himself if he had done anything that was truly effective. As he stated "I don't mean just pawing the ground – anyone can go through the motions – but something really effective."

It is entirely possible that I already know what to do in the New Year and have known for a long time. Maybe all of us have the knowledge of what we need to do in our lives already. Do I really need to read another article on how to lose weight or reduce stress? Or do I really need to stop going through the motions, or listening to another so called expert. Maybe it's just time to stop pawing the ground and, on a daily basis, do something really effective. And at the end of the day I should ask myself if I succeeded.

I am reminded that even within his grand ego, Churchill was a humble man. He once said, "I like pigs. Dogs look up to us. Cats look down on us. Pigs treat us as equals."