



Dear Friends,

New Year, New President. New Government. New chances? President Biden in his inaugural address called upon us to reflect on the values that we hold as Americans. I'm sure we could count off a number of those values, which is as it should be for us citizens. That made me think. Can we, as Catholic Christians, count off *our* values? I don't mean doctrines or theology, but what are the "values" of the Christian faith? Do we know where to find them if we're not sure what they are?

The President had a good point: if we can call to mind the values we hold as a nation, we can find a common ground upon which to build. Right now, such a common ground will be essential for us as our nation faces so many issues and works to find solutions together. Shared values provide an anchor.

We Catholic Christians have shared values as well. But I wonder if we are consciously aware of them. If we're not, perhaps we should try to discover what they are so we can find a common ground within our own Church. Because, like the nation, our Church is divided right now and we have serious issues to address. We need an anchor beyond obedience to Rome.

One place we should look for our values is rather obvious: the New Testament of the Bible. But to find the values, we have to *read* the New Testament and reading the Bible is *not* one of our values. When was the last time, if ever, you sat down and read one of the four Gospels from beginning to end? Or one of the Letters of St. Paul? And if you did, did you understand what you were reading? For people of my generation, we were told we should not read the Scriptures. We were told every household should *have* a Bible in it, but we were not to read it. Go figure!

Today we're trying to get the younger generations to pick up that book and read it. But then we run into another problem: the Bible contains writings that are 1.) two to five thousand years old and 2.) were written in languages no one speaks anymore. So, to *understand* those writings means we have to check with the scholars who have learned those languages and studied how the ancients viewed the world. After all, 2,000 years ago everyone knew the earth was flat, the Emperor was a god, and all life came through the male of the species. In addition, English would not become a language for centuries, just to name a few differences.

Our parishes have tried to offer Bible studies, but the vast majority of parishioner don't seem to feel the need for it. So, how are we to know the "values" that anchored Jesus' life, values that should be the same ones that anchor ours? Today, many don't even value going to Mass on Sunday where we can at least hear some portions of the Scriptures. How can we be sure of the values we try to teach our children, if we don't know the values contained in the Gospels?

Preaching by the clergy and others as well as books written about spiritual life can help us uncover some of the values, but, the Scripture, the Word of God, always opens new avenues to explore. That's why we believe these ancient documents can speak to the 21st century as well as they did to the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment.

Down the centuries the Church has fostered values gleaned from the New Testament and offered them to each different era. Since we are now living in a constantly changing world (a global world that has shrunk due to air travel and modern communications, the arrival of “Alexa” and “Siri” and new realms opened up by modern science), we need once again to discover how biblical values fit into our modern, ever changing culture and society. While the world changes, God doesn’t. What he said to Moses is as true today as it was on Mt. Sinai. Jesus speaking in Aramaic to Jerusalem and Galilee, speaks in English to BrookPark today. Can we name the values he calls us to embrace? Can we find our anchor?

“Thank you” to all who have sent cards and gifts over this Christmas season. I appreciate your thoughtfulness and generosity. I apologize for not being able to write Thank You’s to each person, but the hunt for some place to live once I retire has consumed my time and energy. I am pleased to let you know I have a condo. I don’t have anything to put in it just yet, but it will come. God bless you all.

I would also like to thank all who have continued to financially support our parish. I realize the current situation has laid a heavy burden on your back, making your contributions all the more sacred. God bless you for your support.

Let’s continue to pray for our medical and first responder personnel, as well as those 400,000 men, women and children who have died from this disease and for those who mourn them.

Fr. Denis