



Stock image

**Reflections • Thursday 20 December 2018 •  
By Bishop Jeremy Greaves**

## **Blessings for the New Year**

The beginning of a New Year is, for many of us, the time to make resolutions that are meant to change us for the better in the coming year: resolutions that mostly don't last until the end of January. It is the time when people take out gym memberships, sign up to music lessons or enrol in any number of courses that will be abandoned

long before they are finished. Despite this, I have not given up on New Year's resolutions because there is always important work that comes before choosing what new thing I am going to do 'this' year.

You see, no matter what becomes of our New Year's resolution, the process of personal reflection is incredibly important. The process of stopping, of reflecting on my life, on the relationships that sustain me, on the work I have done and all the work I still have to do is always what informs my New Year's resolutions. And yet, with every passing year, we become more and more distracted and give less and less time to this important work. Our time for reflection is being whittled away like never before — and we have no idea how that affects our wellbeing (although there is now significant work being done to assess the impact of Facebook and Instagram and mobile technology on our lives). After all, the awareness of our own thoughts and feelings and motivations, which we refer to as personal reflection, is what makes us human. If we sacrifice a significant amount of that, what do we become?

A good New Year's resolution might be to take time to escape social media and mobile technology on a regular basis — to regularly find quiet moments to just sit and think, or experience the simplicity of nature, or go to a restaurant with friends or family while leaving the phone in the car. Or, play a game that is not computer related. When you are with people, appreciate them with your undivided attention – do not take your phone to the dinner table...or to bed!

Even if we manage it only for a week, it might be the beginning of rediscovering a world that many of us have almost forgotten, a world of real people, of real beauty and of real life. We might even rediscover something worth persevering with for longer than just a couple of weeks.

Several years ago, John O'Donohue, one of my favourite Irish poet's wrote a New Year's blessing for his mother entitled *Beannacht (For Josie)*. It is a blessing that calls us to pause and be still, to notice what is going on and to receive God's blessing in all of that.

May you know the abundance of God's blessing in whatever unfolds for you in this New Year.



Stock image

**Reflections • Thursday 20 December 2018 •  
By The Rev'd Andrew Schmidt**

## **The difference between sitting and sharing a meal with someone**

When I still worked in schools. I came across a task that an English teacher had set, which I thought was brilliant. To pick a villain, an antagonist, and to write the person a love letter, explaining why you loved him or her. The idea

was to help the students write better villains, and to help them to understand that no one is the villain of their own story. The goal behind the goal was to build empathy in the students, to help them see others as being more than just cardboard cut-outs, and to recognise that all people have a depth of experience to their lives.

The truth is, we are all the protagonists of our own stories, and mostly wish to be seen as the hero. Maybe a tragic hero who has been backed into an untenable position, the hard done by, misunderstood, mistreated hero, the misunderstood man or woman of conviction. The realisation is that we all want to see ourselves as good people, but sometimes the question of what is good in our circumstances is difficult.

In the Old Testament Scriptures there is a good word, a great word even, which unfortunately does not have a direct English translation, which might give us some guidance, especially in 2019's 'Year of Generous Hospitality'.

### ***Chesed***

It is a Hebrew word that seems to blend loving kindness, with acts of generosity and engagement. My favourite demonstration of *Chesed* is Ruth in her response to Naomi. If you haven't read anything from the Old Testament in while, that is a great book to read.

In the story we see care for Naomi as a person, rather than just abstract care. An analogy may help — think of the difference between sitting and sharing a meal with someone, or just giving him or her some food and moving on. *Chesed* calls us to care and engagement, to seeing the other as being of value for who they are

For Jews and Christians alike we see first that God demonstrates *Chesed* with us, and then we respond.