

Here we are, at the start of another new year. This is a time for new hopes, new beginnings and the ever-popular or un-popular new year's resolutions! So, once again, we try don't we? Mine always end up being the same – this year I resolve to be more productive with my time, to eat healthier, to exercise more regularly, to organize my office, and maybe, just maybe, finally get around to putting the family pictures in a albums. It would be nice when my seventeen year old daughter asks "Can we look at my baby pictures?" to pull out a book instead of a shoebox! Wouldn't it be great if just putting these resolutions into words, just saying them or writing them could make them happen? That would actually make coming up with resolutions worthwhile!

It's a fantasy of course, a dream that mere words would bring about results. And yet, there is something to putting goals and dreams into words. Words are powerful, and they play an important part in the creation of anything new.

In today's gospel, we are told of the power of words, of "The Word" in particular. John writes: *"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."* Not one thing came into being without this Word of God, without the Word that became flesh in the birth of Jesus. The creation story in Genesis so beautifully tells how the word, God's word, brought everything, including the first thing, light, into the world: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light."* God spoke the word, and light was created. God separated the light from the darkness. Going back to our reading from John, we hear that the Word of God, the light of the world is a light that darkness does not overcome.

At various times in our lives, we have difficulty believing that this light of God actually exists, that it is present in every situation we go through, that it has not been overcome by darkness. We face difficult times in our lives – losses, disappointments, broken relationships, deaths, family struggles, economic woes, work pressures, illnesses. And yet, whether we believe it or not, whether we sense it or not, the reality is that God is there with us through everything, that God's light is always present to us through Christ. Just because we don't see it or feel it, does not mean it is not there.

A story I read last year helped make this clear to me. I read about an engineer named Dick Kanto, who is responsible for some of astronomy's newest and most sophisticated instruments. In an interview with him, Kanto was asked what recent discovery excited him most. He said it was new instruments that revealed that an area of space that astronomers previously thought was strangely dark, has turned out to be filled with stars. Kanto's statement makes me realize that these stars did not just suddenly appear. They had been there for ages. It was just that we had no way of seeing them. So until someone discovered them, and told us about them, they did not exist for us. Sometimes our world looks like that, looks strangely dark. But we can trust that, even without sophisticated scientific discoveries, God's light is shining like these unseen stars in the darkness of our lives.

Another truth this illustration points to is that, just as God's word creates, our own words create reality as well. Obviously not in the same way, but nevertheless, human words are powerful creators of reality. Kanto's words and information about his discovery is what made those stars real. Before that, they were not part of our reality because we had not been told about them.

The creation story tells us that God's word created the world. Over and over again, we find God speaking creation into existence. God said "Let there be light" and there was light. God said, "Let the dry land appear"; and it was so. Finally, God said "Let Us make humans in Our image, according to Our likeness" and so we are made in the image and likeness of God.

As such, being made in God's image, we also create through our words. So often, like in the case of the inventor, reality exists, but not for us until we have the words for it. We may be loved by someone, but until that person tells us of their love for us, we do not know it, so it is not real for us. Sometimes we read about long lost relatives finding their way back to each other through documents, letters, emails, or phone calls. Those relationships exist before they meet, before they know about each other, but it is not until words are communicated that the relationships become real for those involved. One family I know had a son who, as a teenager, had a baby with his girlfriend. He was embarrassed to tell his parents. When the baby was about three, he got up the courage to tell them, and this granddaughter brought so much joy into their lives. In reality, the grandparents had had a grandchild for years, but the words of their son were what made her existence real for them.

There is another way, perhaps a more important way that words create. They can often make an incredible difference in the lives of people. I have listened to the words of people's stories or read books that have created whole new ways of thinking for me. I've had supportive friends who, through just the right encouraging word, brought me out of despair into hope. The words "I love you" spoken sincerely create a deeper, more meaningful relationship. The words "I'm sorry, forgive me" create the opportunity for forgiveness and starting over. The words "I'm here for you" create compassion and security.

We also have evidence demonstrating how words can actually form people. Children who are consistently told they are smart, capable, creative often end up becoming smart, capable and creative. Words are powerful for comforting, and even saving lives. Counselors who treat patients, people who work at the Suicide prevention hotlines, or answer crisis calls can actually save lives through the words that they use. They, through their words, create hope, they shine light into the darkness.

Unfortunately, although words can be used to create, they can also destroy. If people are told they are slow, stupid, worthless then they often end up fulfilling that description. Harsh, judgmental, cruel words have been the undoing of many people. Words are often our most lethal weapons – they may not kill the body, but they can certainly destroy the spirit.

We are called, however, to be followers of the Word, the Christ. In Jesus, the word of God is made flesh, living and dwelling among us. Jesus not only spoke God's word, but actually lived God's grace and truth. His life brought healing, forgiveness, hope, salvation to the world. He sowed us that the Word is not simply a written or spoken word. It is a lived word.

We are called to be like Jesus, to be that living word, that brings light to lives, and not darkness. We are to live the word not only through what we say, but also through what we do.

Perhaps instead of New Year's resolutions this year, we are better off picking the word that we want to speak into being. In her Feasting on the Word commentary, Barbara Brown Taylor talks about bringing a word to life. She says that each of us has a gift for bringing to life a word, whether that word is compassion, justice, generosity, patience or love. "Until someone acts upon these words," she observes, "they remain abstract concepts – very good ideas that few people have ever seen. The moment someone acts on them, the words become flesh. They live among us, so we can see their glory."

So- in the beginning of 2010, we created ... what? Compassion? Justice? Peace? You fill in the blank. Choose a word, act on it, let it become flesh, let it live among us so we can see its glory.

Today we have the opportunity to start the year by being nourished through the sacrament of Communion. Here is another example of where Jesus spoke words, giving new meaning to ordinary elements. His words create bread that is life-giving, and a cup that proclaims the new covenant. May this Communion give us strength for our journey into the new year. As we partake of this meal, may we join with Christ to live out the grace and truth of his word.

Amen.