

The God with two faces

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The first month of the new year, January, takes its name from *Janus*, a god of Greek mythology. He was the god of beginnings, and when babies were born or new projects begun, his blessing was specially desired. This god is featured on ancient coins, and it is interesting to see that he has two faces, one looks ahead to the future and the other looks backwards to the past.

As we begin a new year, let us take notice of the hint that the Greeks can give us—that every new beginning bears some reference to the past. New beginnings are nice. When you move to a new house or start on a new job, there is something of an adventure about it. Often we approach such new phases with some fear; we do not know how we are going to cope and sometimes we are scared of all that might happen. But every new opportunity, even though it involves something we may fear, brings with it a new challenge—to make an effort and to overcome. So let us pray a prayer for the future:

“Almighty God, to whom the future is known, and with whom the future is not to be feared, prepare for my feet a way, and grant me a deep sense of your companionship, so that even though you are Creator and I am only one of your creatures, I shall travel the road ahead as a child who takes a father’s hand”.

But before we start out on the 1976 path, let us look back at '75 and learn from the past. What are the things that have given us most satisfaction?—The fruit of hard work, the result of endeavour, the friendship and kindness of people? Is it not so, that the things which have pleased us most have been associated with diligence and hard work and also with people. And there have been failures, too. Times of indiscipline, lack of self-control; hurtful words and resentments. Have there been sorrows?—and have we accepted these in ways that have made us finer people? There should be a prayer regarding the past, too:

“O God, my Father, the first thing I want to say about the past is to ask forgiveness for all that you have seen to be wrong in me, in my attitudes, my service and my aim in life. Forgive me for selfishness in its many forms; for opportunities neglected and for giving little attention to spiritual matters. I would also thank you for many blessings; for provision even when I have been unaware of my own need, for evidence of your faithfulness, even when I have been unfaithful to you.”

Yet, in one sense, there is no ‘yesterday’ and ‘tomorrow never comes’, for the point of time that always matters is “Today”. It is where we stand now that demands our full attention. It is the world of ‘Today’ and not of ‘Tomorrow’ in which we have to live, to exercise our wills, to make our decisions and to apply our strength. And although we would often wait and let the present day slip aimlessly away, it is today that we must live. We are not like a lot of corks bobbing about aimlessly upon the ocean, but we are people in communication with God and are made to know His guiding and sustaining power.

“Eternal Spirit, embrace and guide us.

Give us counsel in our decisions and inclinations.

Keep us from evil and help us to love goodness.

Calmly control us in times of fear and anxiety.

And insofar as we are blessed with many good things,

Help us to value each gift, and use it wisely and well,

For Your sake, not merely for our own”.