

# SoulSpace

SERIES: NEW YEAR, NEW YOU

Season colour: **WHITE**

In this new series, **Gerard Moloney CSsR** offers tips for being a better Christian in 2018.



## HAPPY FAMILIES

**M**ark McKinnon is one of the top political consultants in the United States, having worked for both the Democrats and Republicans as a media strategist.

Some time ago, he wrote about his life and a new wisdom and insight he had gained. He described himself as being one of the luckiest people he knew. He had a good life and a great career; he was at the top of his game professionally and earned lots of money, and, most important of all, he had two daughters and a wonderful wife, named Annie, who was his high school sweetheart.

Then, some years ago, disaster struck. Annie contracted a particularly aggressive form of cancer that left her with little hope of recovery. Her chances of survival were estimated at about 15 per cent. Annie went through every kind of surgery and treatment available, and, against all the odds, she beat the cancer. She was restored to health.

Annie's battle with cancer forced Mark McKinnon to look at his life and what was important to him. He realised that he had been given a precious gift, the gift of time – more time with Annie; time to watch their children grow and have children of their own; time to appreciate life more.

And he decided he was going to make the most of it. So he sat down and looked at his age, his family history, and his own medical history. He calculated that, all going well, he could expect to live for another 10,136 days. Then he went out and bought two glass jars – and 10,136 beads. He filled one jar with the beads, left the other one empty, and put both jars on his desk. Now, every day he takes one bead from the full jar and places it in the other. And that's how he measures his days.

"Every day when I take out a bead, I stop for a moment, close my eyes, and say a prayer of thanks. Thanks for my health. Thanks for my friends. Thanks for

my two incredible daughters. Thanks for a lucky, lucky life. And thanks most of all for Annie."

His wife's illness had led Mark McKinnon to re-examine his life. By any common definition of the word, Mark McKinnon is a wise and intelligent man, as his successful career shows. But he has acquired a deeper sort of wisdom, too – an appreciation of what really matters, an attitude of gratitude.

## LISTS AND RESOLUTIONS

**A**t the start of every new year most of us make plans. We draw up lists and jot down resolutions - maybe to lose weight, or go to the gym, or do better at school, or watch less TV, or cut back on social media, or spend more time with loved ones. Drawing up lists and jotting down resolutions seems to be the thing to do at this time of year. We have had the excesses of Christmas; we are beginning to move out of deep mid-winter – so it's a time for starting over, turning over a new leaf, maybe even changing direction.

We start off with enthusiasm, but very soon that enthusiasm wanes. We drift back into old habits. Perhaps the trick is to not be too ambitious, to settle on one or two objectives and work on them.

It took Annie McKinnon's illness and recovery for her husband to reconsider his priorities, and to put God and his family at the centre of everything. Moving a bead from one jar to the other each morning reminds him of the beauty and importance of each new day, and to make the best use of it.

Today is the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. As you prepare to ring in the new year, resolve to appreciate your family more. Resolve to tell them every day that you love them, and resolve to make God part of your family circle, too. ■



## Today's readings

**Genesis 15:1-6, 21:1-3**

**Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19**

**Luke 2:22-40**

St Luke blends two Jewish observances in this story. According to one, a first-born boy was regarded as already dedicated to God's service and so had to be bought back or "redeemed" by a special offering. In the other, a woman after childbirth had to undergo a ritual bath and some rites in thanksgiving for her child. In the drama of this reading, the young family of Joseph and Mary and their newborn son meet two representatives of "old Israel". Simeon and Anna represent what is best in that tradition – piety, prayerfulness and fidelity to the ancient hope that God would deliver them. Simeon's prayer is the calm, contented prayer of an elderly person who has seen their dreams fulfilled. It also forms part of the church's official night prayer. To Anna, also an elderly woman, is given the grace of the spirit of prophecy and she becomes, along with the shepherds of Bethlehem, one of the first proclaimers of the Gospel.

## GOD'S WORD TODAY

**T**his is the time many of us make New Year's resolutions. The feast of the Holy Family is an opportunity for us to think about our own family relationships and what we can do to appreciate and love each other all the more.

