



Dear Sisters and Brothers,

*(I've written this same letter in several New Year's bulletins but I hope you'll agree it's one worth repeating).* The top ten songs, books, headlines, news items, and movies: have you had your fill of end-of-the-year **Top Ten Lists**? Well, I hope you have room for one more and this one will get pretty personal - so handle it with care. What were **The Top Ten Stories of YOUR Life in 2016**? Think you might not have 10 stories? Let me offer ten questions we all might ask to help each of us make our list.

- 1)** What was the ***happiest story*** of your life in the past year? What brought you deep-down-inside joy? What brought you serenity? Peace? Who were the characters in that story? How did the story begin? Has it ended? With whom have you shared this story? What might you do to keep this happy memory alive in your heart, you mind and your memories? Have you thanked God for this happiness?
- 2)** What was the ***most spiritual story*** in your life in 2016? When were you most aware of God, of your Higher Power, your soul? What was your deepest moment of prayer? What occasioned it? Sustained it? Confirmed it? What's the story of your spiritual growth this past year? If you belong to a faith community, how have you deepened your relationship with it? How have you shared your spirituality with others? If you don't belong to a faith community, might you think of joining one in 2017?
- 3)** What was the ***most selfless story*** of your past year? How did you sacrifice for someone else? What did you give up? What did you let go of? Did you go without for the sake of someone else? In what ways were you generous in serving others? Did you share and give from your excess or did you give until you felt the pinch? What did you receive in the giving? How might you let others be generous to you in 2017?
- 4)** What's the most significant ***story of your making peace*** in the year behind you? What old grudges did you let go? What chips did you finally brush off your shoulder? What resentments did you broom from the corners of your heart? Whom did you forgive? Whose forgiveness did you accept? What differences and divisions did you help to resolve? What hard feelings are you carrying into the new year - and how will you work at letting them go? Are you at peace with God? How might you be a peacemaker in the new year?
- 5)** What's the ***most selfish story*** you recall from the past year? (It's important to ask this hard question!) Did you prosper at the expense of someone else? Were there times when you put your own needs ahead of those around you at home or at work or at school? How did your selfishness hurt others? What have you learned about yourself in all of this? Have you made amends for your selfishness? How might you be less selfish and more generous in 2017?

**6)** What was *the saddest story* you have to tell from 2016? (Again, this is a difficult but important question to ponder...) What happened that left you feeling wounded, empty, lost? Who helped you through that time? Who shared your burden with you? Were you able to bring your sorrow to the Lord? What did you lose in this story - and what did you find? Have you healed from the sadness or are you still clinging to it? How can you reverence this memory without letting it run your life? Did you bring your sadness to prayer? Have you asked for the Lord's healing of this sadness? How might you open your heart wider to joy in 2017?

**7)** What *story of beauty* comes to your mind from the year past? Something in nature? A concert? Watching a child grow? A wedding? A friendship? A work of art? A book or a poem? A vacation? A personal accomplishment? A touch, an embrace, a newfound love? How did you express your gratitude for such beauty? Have you thanked God from whom all blessings flow? How did you share it? To whose experience of beauty did you contribute? Do you make time for moments of beauty in your life? How might you open your eyes and ears and heart to beauty in the year ahead?

**8)** What's the *most unfinished story* of your life from 2016? What are the loose ends that you need to tie up? What fear, hesitation or just plain laziness has kept you from completing something you wanted and needed to do? Are others waiting for you to bring this in? Are you waiting for others to help you? Are you slow to accept others' help? What still needs to be done - and how and when will you get to that in the year ahead? What peace, what happiness might be yours were you to bring some closure to this unfinished story? Or is this a story best left behind, one you need to let go of? What will become of this story in 2017 and how will God be part of your story in the new year?

**9)** What was the *story of the greatest challenge or change* in your life in the past year? How did this change or challenge impact your life? Your spirituality? Your faith? Your relationships with others and your understanding of their difficulties? If this challenge, this change was hard, how did you seek and accept help in living with it? If it was a happy one, how have you shared it with others and allowed others to benefit from it? How did this experience relate to other challenges and changes in your life? How might this experience shape the new year ahead of you? Are you ready for that? Will you seek the Lord's help in what changes and challenges you in 2017?

**10)** What's the *story of new acquaintances and friends* who became part of your life in 2016? How did you meet them? Did your first impressions of others sometimes change in surprising ways? How did these new people welcome you into their lives? How have you welcomed them into your life? How is your life richer for having these new folks in your life? How have you enriched their lives? Do you already know some people around you whom you might reach out to in 2017? How will you deepen your relationship with God in the new year ahead?

I doubt that your "Top Ten" list or mine will be published in newspapers, magazines or online. Still, pondering these questions and looking at the year past with an eye to 2017 might be helpful. We all have a new year ahead of us and with it will come new stories to add to our personal histories. I pray that yours will be filled with faith, hope and love for you and all whose paths will cross yours in 2017. **Happy New Year!**

Sincerely,  
Fr. Fleming