

Today, New Year's Day - beyond the fuzzy heads - finds us thinking of a better tomorrow, some new resolutions or new attitudes to begin the year.

In that spirit, an article in last Thursday's San Francisco Chronicle caught my eye, "Secret to happy holidays: Just think happy thoughts." It turns out we don't have to be miserable during the holidays. That's now scientifically proven by studies done by U.C. Berkeley scientist and Psychology professor Dacher Keltner.

Keltner and his Greater Good Science Center, have come up with quantifiable, tested data showing that with little more than "an attitude boost, anyone can get through the toughest of holiday times with not just a smile on his face, but real warmth in his heart." Giving thanks, spending time with family in ways that bring comfort and togetherness go along ways, they say.

It appears to be about concentrating on the things in our lives that work well and being thankful for them, then tossing in a huge helping of compassion. Christine Carter, Sociologist of the center, says, "Our brains act as giant filters. We are either going to notice what we appreciate or things that tick us off."

I'd say that the efforts we make to start off the year with New Year's resolutions, or with a new positive perspective, is indeed well worth it.

Isaiah the prophet, in today's lead reading, sounds like he gets it! ***I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation, has covered me with the robe of righteousness.*** That sounds like an attitude boosting bit!

There is a similar sense of giddy joy as the apostle Paul writes to the church in Galatia, ***But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law,...God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'***

To seize on these thoughts/words from the heart and mind of the faithful ones, and cling to and remember them, will serve us well as we step into the New Year! And we all know we need strength for the journey into 2012, for there are powerful forces that, in an instant, can wipe away the joy we claim or the "happy thoughts" we will to create.

The gospel reading is a case in point. No sooner had the wise and faithful Simeon said *Lord, now you are dismissing your servant in peace...for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to your people Israel* than he whispers to Mary, *This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed - and a sword will pierce your own soul too.*

There are powerful forces inside us and outside us that “happy thoughts” alone cannot control. Natural impulses set within us, we children of Adam and Eve, can be corrupted becoming an evil to serve. That evil spawns all kinds of manifestations that can take over the mind and the heart. We know this; we feel this.

For Mary and Joseph, strength to resist these impulses came in their humble orthodoxy, bringing their firstborn to the temple, to be named and marked with the sign of the covenant.

We do well to remember a similar and extraordinarily powerful practice of our piety as we begin this New Year.

In a moment we will have opportunity to affirm our baptismal covenant. I can think of no better way to start the year than by hearing the words of promise that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever! That’s what I call the ultimate attitude boost

And then, together, we’ll have opportunity to affirm the intention to *live among God’s faithful people, hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper, proclaim the good news of God in Christ in word and deed, serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the world.*

Let this affirmation be our new year’s resolution! Let the joy of the birth of Jesus, on this Eighth Day of Christmas, be the light that continues to shatter the darkness and reveal God’s peace in our minds, hearts, and homes this new year.