

## Auld Lang Syne by Father Don Farnan

Somewhere in my education, I was taught that we should always be both satisfied and dissatisfied with ourselves, i.e., we should be grateful for all that we have experienced and accomplished but, at the same time, acknowledge that we can do better. As one year ends and another begins, we are provided a perfect opportunity to reflect upon our achievements and relationships while making resolutions toward loftier objectives.

When the Scottish poet, Robert Burns, penned the lyrics to “Auld Lang Syne” in or around 1877, he admitted to simply embellishing an ancestral ballad as told to him by an old man—probably while downing a pint of ale and/or bottle of whiskey. Rabbie (as he was called), along with his friends, toasted year’s end by lifting a glass while singing an ode to the passage of time. And we have been doing the same ever since. Much as he did with his buddies, we gather with ours around what is often considered to be the favorite song that nobody knows—synonymous with “let’s get drunk and sing.” December 31 marks a journey’s end that invites us to pause and look back upon all that happened, offer gratitude for those we met along the way, recall our adventures and experiences, then find rest before waking to new frontiers—pledging to not forget what once was.

The past should not be forgotten. “Auld lang syne” translates literally to “old long since” or in modern vernacular to “days gone by.” The final verse and chorus capture its sentiment well: “...and here’s my hand, my trusted friend, now put your hand in mine. We’ll take a cup of kindness then and toast to auld lang syne. Should old acquaintances be forgot and never called to mind; let’s lift that cup of kindness then and drink to auld lang syne.” Year in and year out we encounter new and old acquaintances; and each year is an adventure. His toast is simultaneously sad and joyous, leaving us to gulp down a range of emotions.

The Catholic Church’s final Mass as the sun sets on the outgoing year and the first Mass as the sun rises upon a new one honor Blessed Mother Mary; she brought Christ into her world in time and space long ago and far away while we are charged to bring Christ into our world through kind acts here and now. As she witnessed, shepherds adored him, kings and magistrates feared him, astrologers traversed afar to gift him, and she pondered all of these things reflecting upon them in her heart. She treasured what transpired as an old prophet told her that a sword of sorrow would pierce that same pondering heart because her son embodied the hopes and fears of all the years, past and future. Somewhat like Mary, at the ending and beginning of each year, we look back to capture what has been and look ahead to dream of what will be. Caught in our own space and time we, too, ponder, reflect, and treasure things in our hearts while participating in eternity’s unfolding.

Like the famous song that nobody knows, we exist in the mystery of what remains unknowable.

Whether eternity is timelessness or the essence of time itself, as Christians we marvel at the Incarnation of God and take our cue from Mother Mary. Though her place and time were vastly different from ours, we somehow gaze through the lens of a similar faith. Looking back we find both satisfaction and dissatisfaction but mostly gratitude; and we look ahead with hope that, like Mary, we'll offer assent to God's will for us. Just as she put her hand in God's hand, we will walk with the Lord and with future acquaintances that are waiting to join us on life's journey. Though our hands reach out to what is yet to come and to doing better, our memories hold lovingly to old acquaintances, to achievements we accomplish, to regrets we suffer, and to time gone by.

"So take my hand, my trusted friend; just put your hand in mine. We'll lift a cup of kindness then and drink to auld lang syne."

Father Don Farnan