Columns
Spirituality



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While attending a Western Region meeting of Signis India at Mumbai the day before Gaudete Sunday, I participated at Mass the evening before, since I had to travel early the next morning. Of course, a melodious singing set the joyful tone but after the proclamation of the word, there wasn't any homily. Instead, the priest read from a well-prepared paper urging the faithful to do an examination of conscience.

Well, another year has gone by and we are ready to change the wall calendars and pick up a good 2023 diary. This year's merchandise has gone to the back of the store awaiting a vendor to take it to the depository, and things that have lost their beauty and charm gradually move out of our living rooms. Because they are mere objects and can even be discarded.

This is what happens in our everyday lives — with things, like pots and pans. Whereas humans — social beings, with feelings and emotions, as delicate as an earthen vessel, so frail and fragile — the idea of discarding them is unthinkable and should not even have a place in our homes or offices. But definitely, an examination of conscience is absolutely right!

In a store, I heard a lady saying to the storekeeper: "Anything that we buy has a warranty, a guarantee and an [expiration date], while the life of a human being is uncertain, though without expiry but highly valuable, prized with dignity and valor." ("So true," I murmured).

She continued: "Though created in his image and likeness without expiry, there are ample ingredients provided to take care of the created image to serve and fulfill its purpose, and the purpose is spelled out by St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians: 'to be holy and blameless' " (Ephesians 1:4).

The end of 2022, indeed, was another year of gratitude for the saving love of Abba, amid the different variants of COVID-19 and other diseases, cyclones, war, the fall and rise of governments, and so on. Human beings are so vulnerable that we fall prey to anything, anyone, anywhere.

It is high time we need to start acting smart and use the free intelligence given by God to glorify his name, since God is our Creator with skills of an architect, artist, designer — interior and exterior. Yes, God is so creative, that there's no match: It's amazing!

Such a *creative* Creator — for there are no two human beings alike. Though born of the same parents they are different in nature — even in their blood groups. Identical twins even have some differences. Is it not a wonder? Should we not stand in awe and amazement?

My imagination draws me to consider how, of the children born to the same parents, one stands out as a genius, while the second is a slow learner, and the third is an average one who struggles to think out of the box.

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The phrase *think out of the box* reminds me of a short motivational story by Carmelite Fr. Ligoury Crasta that gives an example of creative thinking — thinking out of the box.

Yes, thinking out of the box is the need of the hour. Being smart is the key: Having a doctorate without being smart is like having a child in the driver's seat! The modern media techy world with all its digital platforms — so promising — but one without creative thinking and "smartness" cannot survive its pressure. The once-big-name software Adobe Photoshop and CorelDraw are outdone by easy ones like Canva, and the sophisticated video editing tools have been replaced with simpler versions.

In any situation, there is always a way to get out of the woods, and it is not only the traditional path that is the way through it.

The girl in the story, whose father could not repay his loan from the loan shark, had the intelligence and creativity of a genius, and outsmarted the old loan shark with creative thinking. She was so observant and watchful that she saw the loan shark picking two black pebbles (though he said there was one white and the other black) in order to trap the girl into marriage. He offered the girl the bag, to choose one pebble.

Oh yes, she pretended to draw out a pebble from the bag, and acted clumsy and threw it on the ground among the other pebbles. Then she apologized for being clumsy and asked him to get the remaining pebble from the bag, so they would know which pebble she picked. By being smart, observant, wise, humble and gentle, she saved her father and herself from the cunning loan shark.

At the beginning of the year, in our everyday lives, there are times we find ourselves looking at possible options and we get so confused that it drains our energy. The other creative options — thinking out of the box — become mundane or dull. Sometimes the pressure and overthinking blurs our vision; our resources, inner strength and energy get drained. We tend to forget the motivating words of St. Paul: "to be holy and blameless."

Our daily chores, apostolate and spiritual duties — all these demand discipline and faithfulness. The difficulties and temptations on the road to success become our priorities. So, overcoming the obstacles that hamper our purpose of living a holy and blameless life keeps before us a challenge.

Spending time in prayer is essential, and seeking inspiration and motivation from good reading is another strategy. Other aids are keeping ourselves engaged with physical exercises and activities: watering plants, gardening, playing music, writing short poems or journaling.

New Year is a good time to look ahead with hope (for hope does not disappoint us), to renew our resolutions to be different, and do some creative thinking. The deeper we dig, more water comes out from the springs beneath.

The year 2023 is a precious gift wrapped with a beautiful paper having words "creative thinking — in the making." Let's explore our God-given talents and make 2023 a year of grace and benevolence.