

A New Year

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The month of January is for many a time of reflection on the year that has passed and a time for planning the year ahead. If we have come safely through another year, we are blessed. We should give thanks for that. If our health has been good and our family safe and well, then that is a blessing beyond measure. It is right to thank God for these things. Some of us will have suffered losses, and perhaps Christmas was lonely. If we got through that, then we can look forward to a year of healing and hope. January is a hopeful time. It can be a cold month weather wise, but there is always the promise of the coming spring. There will certainly be ups and downs in the new year, surprises and joys and difficulties and hard times too, but if we get through them, then all is well.

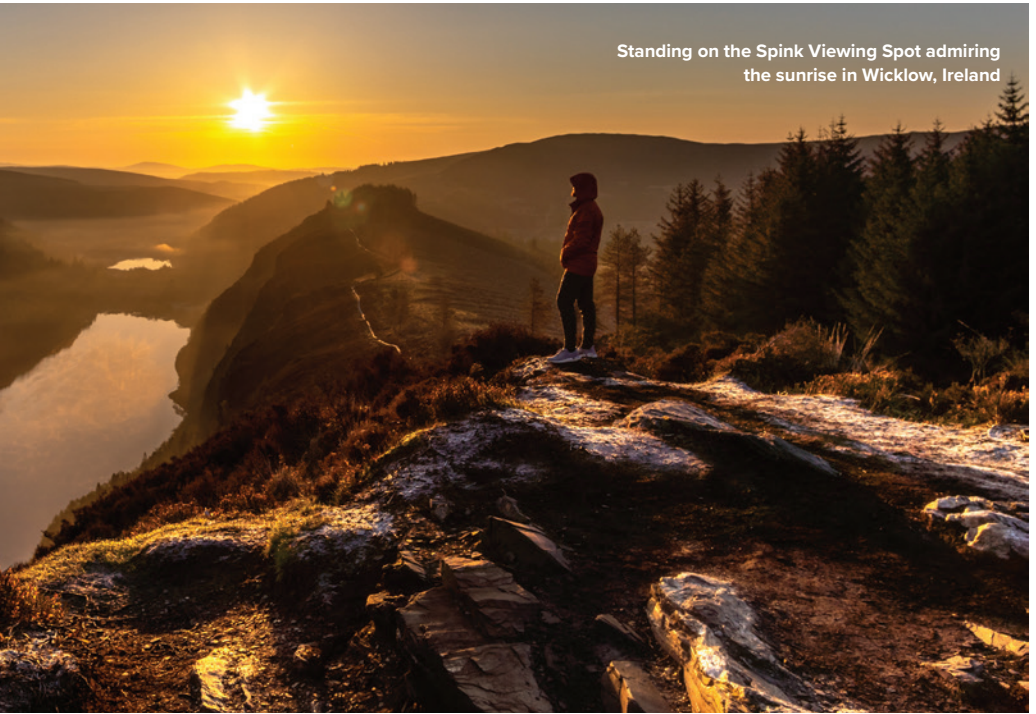
The old Irish saying holds true. *Go m'beirimis beo ag an am seo arís* ('that we may be alive this time next year'). If we live through yet another year, we will be blessed. I'm not denying that life is hard, but, in its light and shade, it is always a gift. There is certainly, I believe, deep inside us, the will to live, along with a deep appreciation of life, if we tap into it. The world is beautiful and there for us to enjoy and care for. Nature is always available to us. Personally I find great



comfort in its beauty. There is a temptation to take life for granted, but our earthly lives are not forever. It is up to us to try to make the best of our circumstances whatever they may be, and we can always notice beauty.

We all have hopes and dreams for the coming year. We will make New Year resolutions and plans, and the shops are busy selling diaries and calendars. We may be planning a holiday or wedding. We might decide on a new career path or course of study. We may want to exercise more or finally lose weight. Whatever it is, January offers us a fresh start, and the year stretches ahead full of possibilities. Still our common future is unknown. For me the unknown future holds a mixture of fear and

Standing on the Spink Viewing Spot admiring the sunrise in Wicklow, Ireland



anticipation. I believe we should first and foremost pray about it. We really are dependent on God for everything. Sometimes we do not realise this fully and try to do things on our own. I know I do. As humans, however, we are not solitary beings. We need God and each other. It is God's wish that we 'be one', that there be a unity among people. If the kingdom of heaven is among us, then perhaps it is God's wish that we support one another along the path of life.

In order to calm my fear of the unknown and feel hopeful for the year ahead, I think of the poem 'The Gate of the Year' by Minnie Haskins, made famous by King George VI in his Christmas address of 1939: 'I said to the man who stood at the gate of

the year, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied, "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

That poem has beautiful imagery and is in itself a prayer. Whatever your position in life, the future is unknown. You need to trust God. It might be an idea that before you buy that diary or calendar, you light a candle in the church, giving thanks for the year just passed and asking God's blessing on your plans for the year ahead. It might also be an idea to keep a journal in 2026, so that, looking back, you may recognise God's hand in your life and give thanks.