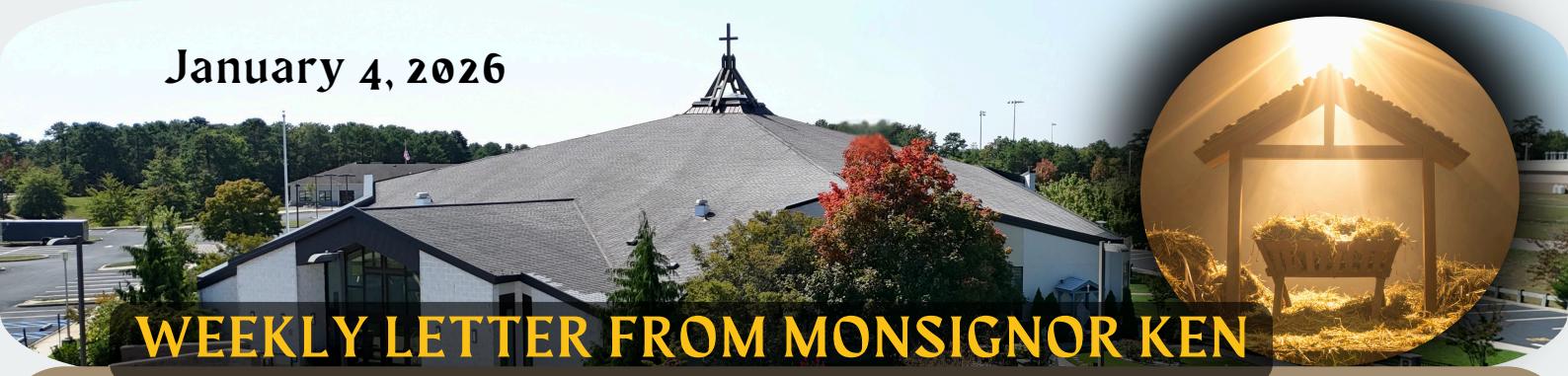


January 4, 2026



Every year we hear about the ongoing battle between saying Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays. I've noticed another variation that doesn't get as much attention, but one that I find a bit amusing. It centers around the tendency with some to focus on the date of Christmas, December 25, believing that it ends on that day. Of course, we know that Christmas is a season. Because of that, it's interesting that it becomes very difficult to say Merry Christmas after December 25. People will look at you funny, as if to say, "Don't you know the date?" The other amusing part of the equation is that after you greet them with Merry Christmas, they will respond, Happy New Year! It's a subtle correction. The implications is, "Don't you know that Christmas is over? Now we are focusing on the New Year." The other fascinating part of this linguistic battle is that it is acceptable to wish someone Happy New Year well into the new year! Apparently, the rule of ending with the date only applies to December 25 but not January 1! It's not a life-or-death issue, but I do find it interesting!

There is another side to the Merry Christmas vs. Happy New Year battle. I'm sure that we have heard the saying, "No cross, no crown," meaning that we cannot achieve true happiness without some suffering. It reminds us that the crucifixion preceded the resurrection. We can't go directly to Easter Sunday without first passing through Good Friday. In that spirit, we can also say that without Christmas, we cannot have a New Year.

It should be obvious that the point is not that the observance of Christmas precedes the observance of New Year's. It means that we cannot, or at least should not, enter the New Year without taking the spirit of Christmas with us into the year. New Year's resolutions are great, but as Catholics we are called to focus on conversion. We should resolve for the new year to be a better Catholic, a better Christian.

Here's a simple analogy to illustrate. If you're going to put fresh paint on a wall, it's best to first prepare that wall, by cleaning, filling holes and even sanding. Failure to do so could lead to peeling and flaking of the new paint. Resolutions are great, but shouldn't we first have Jesus in our heart? Take Christmas with you into the new year!

"No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunken cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved." (Matthew 9:16-17)