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This is the usual activity we do at the beginning of the year, just as what we normally do before embarking on anything new, be it a project, a business, a trip or an excursion.

We should not take this for granted. In fact, we should increasingly sharpen our sense for this need and the corresponding skill, for it is what our basic rationality and freedom require. We are always driven by a sense of purpose which should be given as full a play as possible.

A life without a sense of purpose is not human, let alone Christian life. Sad to say, this is what we are observing in many places nowadays. Many people seem to be living without a clear sense of purpose other than what the erratic impulses of their instincts, feelings and passions, biases, trends would dictate or suggest.

This is not to mention that we are often afflicted with laziness, excessive love for comfort, a lot of attachments to temporal and worldly things, greed, envy, lust and the like that deaden or at least distort our sense of planning.

We cannot overemphasize the many benefits and advantages of planning and goal-setting. It simplifies our life, putting order into our things and affairs. It enables us to be more aware of our priorities. It can save as well as multiply our time and other resources.

Of course, we should always be wary when we so exaggerate it that we become rigid and inflexible. The need for planning and goal-setting is not meant for that. On the contrary, it is meant to equip us properly with the surprises in life.

We should strive to plan things as exhaustively as possible. We should not be contented only with short-term plans, but also with a long-term one. In fact, we should try to plan for life, and even for life hereafter. This is not falling into presumption, as long as we give due consideration also to the legitimate constraints involved.

We need to have some plans and goals to reach in the different aspects of our life—personal, spiritual, family, professional, social and all the way to the political and global. At the same time, let's see to it that all these aspects are integrated into one working and organic whole.

Yes, we cannot be sure of everything. There simply are too many things that are beyond our control, our power and resources. But this reality does not excuse us from planning our life as fully as possible.

Precisely because of it, we need to make plans, to be able to face the different contingencies and vicissitudes of life.

Obviously, such plans may have to be revised and modified many times along the way. This should not bother us. It's part of the territory.

We just have to remind ourselves that in every plan, we always make some calculated assumptions and risks. But central to the whole equation should be the sense of abandonment in the providence of God who can take care of everything, including our mistakes.

Let's remember that God is the source of law and order. He is also the one that enables us to live order. "I can do all things in him who strengthens me," St. Paul says (Phil 4,13) Our sense of the need for planning and goal-setting should begin and end with God. Short of that, we would be developing it improperly.

This is the challenge we have—how to begin and end with God in all the planning and goal-setting we do. Many times, we get contented with merely worldly values and criteria—more knowledge and information, greater efficiency, profitability, etc. We are still very awkward in putting God at the center of it all.

## **REFLECTION: Planning and goal-setting**

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That's why there is a great need to pause and put ourselves in some mode of deep meditation and contemplation to be able to touch base with the most profound longing in our heart that is often muffled by the cares of this world.

What St. Augustine once expressed continues to hold true today: "My heart is restless until it finds its rest in you." Let's do everything so that this sentiment continues to hold sway on us, overcoming the many powerful distractions the world today offers.

This requires a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial, precisely echoing what Christ himself told us that if we want to follow him, we need to deny ourselves and carry the cross. There is no other formula for us to follow.

Everything has to be done so that God becomes the be-all and end-all of our planning and goal-setting.