Wow. Only a week until Christmas Eve. That means the New Year is already almost upon us. Man ... where did 2022 go? Oh, wait ...

Yes, I’m behind the times, I suppose. Listening to “classic” Christmas music on Pandora and “It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas” came on. Good ol’ Bing. And then ... transported to past decades before all the tech stuff pervaded every moment of our lives—cellphones, computers, internet, video games, etc.—a much simpler, and in many ways, a much happier time.

It’s sad that kids are not just out and about nowadays playing in yards, flying kites, riding bikes; they’re all sequestered with video games, and organized activities tend to be their physical outlets. It’s good that there are many sports for them from which to choose in schools; it develops team and community spirit where the neighborhood interaction of kids is now absent, though one must be careful to ensure that it doesn’t detract from their academics. Not many are going to make their livings being professional players, after all, but good academic performance helps in any aspect of life. For everyone. And not just schooling, but real learning.

But, of course, not everything in the past was peachy-keen, so it’s important to remember the good but not to forget the bad so as not to repeat it but remedy it where possible. That principle, of course, depends on the principle embodied in the old saying: “Those who don’t know the past are destined to repeat it.” The recent strife in Gaza/Israel, accompanied by the rather shocking display of antisemitism arising even from wholly unexpected quarters, makes that saying even more ominous.

Something that caught the eye the other day was a news story of an atheist trying to have the Bible banned from a school library, basing the claim that the material was inappropriate for young minds—war, plundering, some incidents of sexual assault, etc. One can’t but be awed at the irony of the proposal considering all that is in common culture these days: books placed even in elementary school libraries outlining sexual acts, both hetero- and homosexual. And then there’s the music, TV shows, video games, and movies that glorify violence, sexual abuse, and all conceivable destructive activities. I couldn’t help but wonder whether the plaintiff had also petitioned that Qu’rans, and pagan, Hindu, etc., texts also be banned (maybe Harry Potter, too?). Unsurprisingly (or, perhaps these days, surprisingly), the petition was not granted. Most can see what a slippery slope that type of censorship would be.

Yes, occurrences of such are in the Bible, but its texts are not the drafting of an idyllic world but largely a recounting of history and, by extension, very fallible humanity. One would have to ban the study of all history if he wants to insulate society from descriptions of good and evil. But history is human experience, and from such experience we (hopefully) learn.

I was thinking of these things while reviewing the Mass readings for the coming week as we approach Christmas, which not unexpectedly contains the genealogy of Jesus as described in the Gospel of Matthew. And it’s quite a cast of characters. If one were to just dream up an ideal genealogy for whom they purport to be divine, you’d expect a lineage of virtually perfect ancestors, especially since heritage was so important to the Israelites. But such is not the case.

Figuring prominently in Jesus’ ancestry are, of course, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel, from whom all the Israelis were descended. But then there are some very notable sinners as well. Perez, for example, was the illegitimate son of Jacob’s son Judah and Judah’s daughter-in-law Tamar, who tricked Judah into believing she was a prostitute. Then there’s Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho, who collaborated with the Israelites in the conquest of that city. Bathsheba, with whom King David committed adultery, and is not even named but simply described as “the mother of Solomon who ‘had been the wife of Uriah’”—Uriah, whom David had had murdered. Then Rehoboam, who succeeded Solomon, and whose harsh and foolish policies ended up splitting the kingdom.

Thus, there is described even in Jesus’ genealogy, a whole line of “sinners and saints”, so to speak ... reminding us not to judge others by their lineage. Like the Christian community at large, a person’s ancestry—or even their past—may be peppered with both saints and sinners. How could it not be when even the Son of God Himself is born of such a varied heritage? For the stain of sin is by no means a barrier to future virtue. Today’s sinner may be—and certainly can be—tomorrow’s saint.

That’s a comforting thought as we roll into Christmas and something to remember when we dwell upon our own weaknesses in not keeping to the good. But the past is past; it’s the present and future in which we can change ... to move forward and seek to better ourselves by our conversions toward the good and Godly. What better time to renew such a resolution than in the Christmas season and new year, when the world is renewed by the birth of goodness Himself in the flesh two thousand years ago, and yet remaining with us “until the close of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)