

The feast of Christ the King marks the end of another liturgical year. A new one begins next Sunday, the first Sunday of Advent.

There is nothing more natural to life on our planet than the cycle of the year. Much of what we do as well as of what we feel is influenced by the rhythmic pattern of spring, summer, fall and winter. Although we celebrate such things as Christmas, Valentine's Day, our birthdays and Easter as well as our winter and/or summer holidays every twelve months, most of us don't grow tired of the repetition. As similar as our Christmases and our birthdays are to one another, they are also different because, with the passing of another year, we are different.

One way of thinking of the yearly cycle is to think of it as a circle in which every 12 months we return to the same point. More aptly, we might think of the passing years as forming a circular path around a mountain. Every twelve months we return more or less to the same place but are now higher up the mountain or perhaps lower. In either case, we are not where we were a year earlier.

The liturgical year ends and begins with a reminder that as circular as our life and the life of the world seem, we are destined to break out of the circle and to arrive at the goal of our journey and the fulfillment of our longings.

Religious language lives on images and metaphors. It does not so much define the great truths about God and human life as point to them and suggest different ways of approaching them.

In the ancient world, most kings were endowed with considerable authority and power. Some were moral and upright, defenders and guardians of their people; others were more or less the opposite. While various books of the Old Testament honour and extol a king like David whom they present as a true shepherd of his people, they revile and condemn leaders who abuse the poor and the vulnerable and who lead their people into suicidal and destructive wars.

It is understandable that, given the power of kings and the positive achievements of which they were capable, people came to think of God as a king, as the greatest of all kings whom even earthly monarchs are to worship and obey.

In the course of his public life, Jesus was not called a king, although that title is implicit in the term Messiah. The word Christ comes from the Greek translation of Messiah, Christos. It means the anointed one. In the Old Testament, kings and priests were anointed as they entered into their respective offices. Paradoxically, the word king was applied to Jesus by the Roman

authorities as they were putting him to death. On his cross, they wrote in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

Throughout his public life, Jesus proclaimed that with him the kingdom or reign of God was breaking into the world. It was not a political or military kingdom but a moral and spiritual one. It is to that kingdom that we are referring when, in the Our Father, we pray, “thy kingdom come.” The following line, “thy will be done,” suggests that to some degree its coming depends on us and on the way we live. The kingdom is not imposed on us from without. It is a spiritual gift that we are invited to accept and to bring to life in our own lives and in the life of the world.

The preface for the feast of Christ the King speaks of Jesus being anointed as the “eternal Priest and King of all creation.” His self-giving on the cross was a world-transforming act which planted the seeds of the kingdom in our hearts, seeds which we are to nourish and make fruitful. With Christ and in the power of his Spirit, we are to contribute in whatever way we can to the coming of what the preface describes as “a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.”

Anything we can do to help and build up others, to further peace and understanding, to counteract destructive forces like racism, prejudice, injustice, sexual and other forms of violence – anything we can do of this nature hastens the coming of the kingdom.

In today's reading, from the book of Revelation, God identifies himself as "The Alpha and the Omega," the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. He is the beginning and the end, the source from which all things come and the goal toward which they are tending.

As cyclical as in some ways life is, at a more profound level it is one-directional. That is true of the whole of created reality as well as of humanity. It is true of each one of us. We have come from God and are on a journey back to him. As limited as we are, we are called so to live that when we come to the end of our journey people will be able to say that the world is a better place for our having been here. In the language of today's feast, in saying that, they will be saying that in the course of our life we have contributed to the coming of the Kingdom.