

How to view time

Homily for September 7 2022
Wednesday 23rd week of Ordinary Time

How do we understand time? Is time best represented by a circle, meaning that it is cyclical and ever repeating? There is much evidence that this is the case. There are the four seasons of the year, and within the life of the Church we follow a Liturgical Calendar that is cyclical, where every year we move from Advent, through Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time.

Although less obvious time can also be represented by an arrow. It is linear, and has a beginning, and end and an ultimate goal, which is to hit the target, and ideally the Bull's Eye.

In today's reading St. Paul wants us to understand that the present cyclical form of the world is transitory and so he writes in the last verse of the reading:

For the present form of this world is passing away.¹

What does this mean? St Paul understands time in light of two events. One that has already happened in time, and one that we still await in the future. The way St Paul views time is now based on the Resurrection and 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ. And while from our limited human perspective the separation of these two events seems interminably long, St Paul wants us to understand that time is best understood when seen not primarily as a circle, but an arrow. With the resurrection of Jesus the arrow was let fly, and when he comes again it will have hit the bull's eye.

It is with this in mind that St. Paul talks about the interrelationship between the celibate and married states. And while he does not claim to have a direct revelation from the Lord on this, he indicates that the celibate state in a special way helps us to more fully grasp the linear nature of time. You will notice that in the reading he mentions the impending crisis. What is this? There are two interpretations. One can mean, the crisis that is part of the cyclical nature of time, where there are wars, hardship, and calamities that characterize life in the present form of the world. But it can also suggest St Paul anticipated Jesus' return might be imminent and in light of that crisis the celibate state was preferable to the married state.

However this being said, St Paul also confirms the value and beauty of marriage, although he rightfully acknowledges:

Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life,²

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (1 Co 7:31). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (1 Co 7:28). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

This is because in the married state where a person is bound to a spouse and children there will be forms of suffering not experienced by a person in a celibate vocation. This doesn't mean St Paul says people should not marry, but we are to live our respected vocations in this world with a certain detachment so:

from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none,³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions,³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it³

It is with this passage in mind that in *Lumen Gentium*, a document of Vatican II that Church highlights the value of the consecrated life:

For the People of God has here no lasting city, ... the celibate state reveals more clearly to all believers the heavenly goods which are already present in this age, witnessing to the new and eternal life which we have acquired through the redemptive work of Christ and preluding our future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom⁴

May we continue to live within the cyclical nature of time in this world, but always keep before us its underlying linear nature when with the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ the present form of the world will pass away.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (1 Co 7:29–31). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁴ Catholic Church. (2000). [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) (2nd Ed., p. 245). United States Catholic Conference.