Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



Group of children in Cusco, Peru (Unsplash/Alexander Schimmeck)



Begoña Costillo

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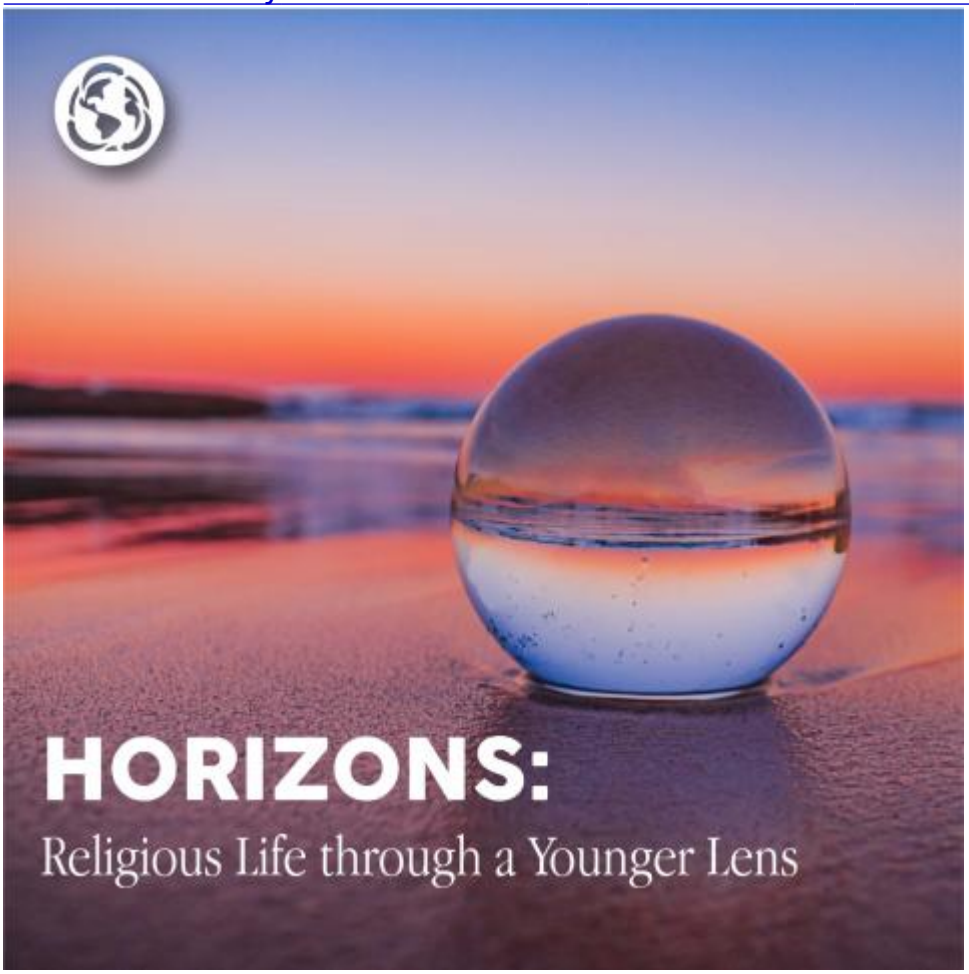
Translated by Helga Leija

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In the Northern Hemisphere, the end of the calendar year coincides with a winter season that draws the natural world toward the conclusion of its life processes. The summer harvest has been gathered, autumn leaves have fallen, and the landscapes stand bare, leaving space for new life to emerge from hidden depths. The image of life's ending is clear.

Not so in the Southern Hemisphere, where nature seems to defy the flow of time. Here, where I live, the year's end arrives at the start of summer, as the fruits of the fields grow to maturity under the warmth of a sun reclaiming its place after winter's months. In early December, Peru's exotic flowers fully bloom, revealing the vibrant colors of the earth's rich produce. The landscape brims with life at its peak, signaling the ultimate goal of all creation's vitality: fruitfulness, abundance, offering life to

others, and the communion between what is given and what is received.

This spectacle of abundance unfolds before me as I walk through the garden of our monastery, located in the heart of Lima. This environment reminds me of the significance of the transition between the end and the beginning of the year. It helps me understand the passage of time, which sometimes, through the repetition of its cycles, can throw us into a meaningless routine.

> 'Time is imbued with meaning, and the passing years are but the road we travel toward the promised fulfillment, abundance and communion — a reality that draws closer with every step we take toward it': Sr. Begoña Costillo
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This sense of futility is especially pronounced when the past year has been marked by bitter events — illnesses that obscure the future, unexpected failures, or setbacks in our personal journey. Even if the year has been blessed with goodness and beauty — joyful events and accomplishments that make us feel like we've progressed — there may still linger, in the depths of our thoughts, a fear of the year ahead. We may fear that it won't measure up to the last, that we'll lose the hard-won successes we've achieved, or that, despite everything, nothing will feel sufficient. Often, this is because we place our hopes in things that cannot justify our entire existence.

In these moments — when the mind rebels against an endless cycle, against absurdity, pain, aging, or illness — we must look beyond the immediate, transcend the calendar, and allow ourselves to be captivated by the promise that stirs in the depths of our hearts. That promise assures us of a destination of fulfillment where all will be made whole — a goal we do not yet fully know but glimpse in certain moments of our history, much like we understand the purpose of life's cycles when we savor the fruits of summer.

This is one of the reasons why, in the monastery, we bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new one with a vigil of adoration. During this practice, we contemplate the One who is both the beginning and the end, the One toward whom all time is directed, for He is the ultimate meaning of time itself. We stand before the living Christ because He guides the journey through which we spend our years. His real

presence among us gives us the proper perspective to reflect on the past year, not through measures of efficiency, success, health or comfort, but through the deep impulse of the heart that cries out, "Come, Lord Jesus!" and seeks Him in every event we have lived.

In Christ, the life we have lived takes on a meaning that transcends our understanding, transforming every moment into a space where God can save us and draw us closer to himself. The apparent successes or joyful fruits of the year become signs of his love and the fullness His presence pours out among us.

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Pain, illness and failures are revealed as fertile ground where Christ shows his victory and mercy—saving, healing, lifting us up, and opening us to the eternal life toward which our days are moving. Under his gaze, the paradoxical course of a world that seems to be dying in wars, hunger, injustice, and natural disasters is reoriented. We know these are but the penultimate words, already giving way to the final Word. That Word dwells secretly within the machinery of history, moving it, mysteriously yet perceptibly, toward its origin and ultimate purpose.

Thus, the losses of the past year are transformed into an offering of life that, when given, is saved — for "whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it forever." The new year opens before us, filled with hope and light, even in the most painful circumstances, for we know who waits for us behind every door. Already, we glimpse his face, his tenderness, and his embrace in the moments of rupture in the present.

At the year's end, we can confidently say that we have seen the Lord, though not yet fully. And so, we continue our journey toward him, drawn ever onward through the reality that challenges us. Time is imbued with meaning, and the passing years are but the road we travel toward the promised fulfillment, abundance and communion — a reality that draws closer with every step we take toward it.

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