

Beauty

*The Heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims
his handiwork. ~ Psalm 19:1*

BEAUTY IS A QUALITY OF UNIVERSAL APPEAL. Our language is replete with adjectives of appreciation: a beautiful woman, an adorable baby, a lovely person, a gorgeous sunset — all descriptions of our awareness of a beauty not of our making.

True beauty, no matter what its kind or nature, is not our creation, but the creation of God. All beauty, whether supernatural or natural, is a reflection of the glory and grandeur of God himself. God *is* beauty, just as he is omnipotence (all power), omniscience (all knowledge), goodness, truth, wisdom, justice, mercy, and love. All of God's works, his creations, partake of his nature. All beauty emanates from the God who is Beauty.

God, wishing to share the riches of his divinity, poured forth love in creation. He began with the establishment of order and beauty in the universe. From nothing, he created the Heavens, and the seas, and the earth; the sun, the moon, and the stars; and all the creatures of the earth, sea, and sky — and he saw them, loved them, and pronounced them good (see Gn 1:1-31) — partakers of all of his own goodness and splendor. Created things reflect their maker, as is poetically expressed in Scripture: *“the stars shone in their watches, and were glad; he called them, and they said, ‘Here we are!’ They shone with gladness for him who made them. This is our God; no other can be compared to him!”* (Bar 3:34-35). We should eas-

ily be able to go from created wonders to the Creator of wonders.

The beauty of the universe, its order and harmony, have opened our eyes to the discovery of the laws of nature. Perceptive scholars and scientists admire what they have seen, and are inspired to respect the created world and its creatures, and thus their Creator.

For all of us on earth, the splendor of creation, such as a mountain meadow or a glorious sunrise or an arching rainbow, delights the eye and mind, and with equal ease should lift the soul to contemplation, recognition, and love for so good and glorious a Maker. Truly God *“is greater than all his works”* (Sir 43:28). He is, indeed, the *“author of beauty”* (Wis 13:3).

God's work of creating an ordered and glorious universe was but a prelude to his creation of humanity to enjoy the outpouring of his love. He created us as the image of himself (see Gn 1:26-27), intended to reflect attributes of the Divinity. We are made to show and communicate God's glory, to share with him his own truth, goodness, and beauty, and destined him for immortality and the joy and friendship of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus told us that his *“good and faithful servant [s]”* would *“enter into the joy of [their] master”* (Mt 25:21) and promised that he himself would call them: *“Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Mt 25:34).



Mother Teresa, by Lisa E. Brown

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God, the tremendous Lover, gave us stupendous powers. He gave us an intellect to explore, to discover, and to know. He gave us a will free to decide, to choose to do or not to do, to say “yes” or “no,” to accept or reject even our Maker. And he gave us the capacity to create new things, to imitate the Maker’s own creative power. Throughout the ages, humanity has manifested an appreciation of beauty, and expressed a sense of the beautiful, in art that pleases the eye and ear of others. Art is a talent bestowed on creatures by a provident Creator who desired his creatures to bring forth, as emanations of their own inner riches and understanding, creations that reflect the glory of God and his creation, and bear the stamp of his own nature.

As human reflections of God’s creation, art and music and literature should lift up the heart and mind in love and adoration of the Giver of all artistic inspiration. The inspired creations of the greatest architects, sculptors, artisans, painters, composers, and authors — the great cathedrals with their stained glass and statuary, Scripture in stone, marble, and glass; the sublime Pieta and awe-inspiring David of Michelangelo; the Last Supper of Leonardo da Vinci; the soul-lifting compositions of Mozart, Bach, Handel, and Beethoven and the great, formal beauty of Gregorian chant; and the great prayers, homilies, and spiritual writings of the saints —



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are the ways we use beauty in worship and praise of the author of all beauty. We, God’s only creatures with body and immortal soul, join both in using the beauty of material arts to offer thanksgiving and honor to the One who made us.

Beyond human creation of works of art, we have been given the capacity and the responsibility for the highest and most sublime of creative works. This capacity is a need to truly seek our God. The human body is a work of art by God, and our appreciation of this gift reaches its ultimate goal when we treat our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul tells us: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you

have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

God has given us yet another gift and awareness: that we are his children. We ought, therefore, in appreciating and responding to him and his infinite love, generosity, and beauty, adorn our own souls with this beauty and treasured attributes. By responding to grace — an additional gift from God — we truly make ourselves “like God”: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Not, this time, in pride as did our first parents (see Gn 3:4-7) but as a creative, lifelong act of love.

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