

Tridentine Community News

September 18, 2011

Wonder, Awe, and Devotion to the Saints: Praising God for the Beauty of His Creation

Catholics are occasionally challenged about our devotion to our Blessed Mother or to the Saints. Are we not idolators? Aren't we "worshipping" what is merely part of God's creation? Countless responses to such questions have been proposed over the years, but today we would like to offer a progression of reasoning that might be a little easier to explain to others.

Most everyone has had their breath taken away at one time or another by encountering something remarkably beautiful. Perhaps it was a work of art or a musical performance. It could be an outdoor vista, such as the sight of the Alps or a tropical island. It could be dramatic architecture: this writer vividly recalls being moved to tears back in 1976 upon walking into Dearborn's Hyatt Regency hotel for the first time. What we are really observing and admiring is the creative handiwork of God.

Similarly, many of us have encountered individuals over the course of our lives who stand out for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they are uniquely brilliant or insightful in their chosen field of endeavor. Perhaps they are uniquely holy or prayerful. Perhaps they live their Catholicism, in both prayer and action, in an exemplary way. Speaking with such exceptional people can be an immensely inspiring, yet humbling experience. This writer recalls having dinner with the inventor of a drug that has saved tens of thousands of lives; one's own concerns and achievements, and the spiritual and temporal needs of mankind, can be put in better perspective via such encounters. Because God is unfathomable in His perfection, our minds can only grasp a more limited level of perfection among His creation. It is far easier to look up to a saintly or accomplished individual than to comprehend the infinite greatness of God. Indeed, marveling at beauty and accomplishment is a universal experience that Catholics and non-Catholics alike have had. Through the eyes of faith, contemplating or communicating with such individuals should actually lead our minds to God, their Creator, the Giver of their abilities.

The Saints, and especially our Blessed Mother, are the penultimate examples of human perfection. Venerating them, as we might honor a living person of great sanctity, is not worshipping them as individuals. It is really giving thanks to God for having given the world the gift of such goodness. If a saintly person is still living, we might ask him or her to pray for an intention we might have. One can reasonably conclude that a person of great sanctity enjoys a close relationship with God which might make his or her prayers particularly efficacious. People of many faiths pray to deceased friends and relatives. When it comes to a canonized Saint, it similarly reasons that someone who is assuredly in Heaven, and to whom at least one miracle has been attributed, can also intercede for us. We are not worshipping the Saint; our veneration is a form of thanksgiving for past and anticipated intercessions. Just as we can worship God by wondering over an object of great beauty, or by seeing His greatness in the unique abilities of a fellow human, so can we do the same by venerating and seeking the intercession of the most perfect of His creation, the Saints already in Heaven.

The Holy Father on Beauty Leading the Mind to God

Shortly the above reflection was written, excerpts from a speech by our Holy Father that address aspects of this very topic were posted on the Rorate Caeli blog, and which are timely to reprint here:

The work of art is the fruit of human creativity, which questions the visible reality, trying to discover its deep meaning and to communicate it through the language of shapes, colours, sounds. ...

One example of this is when we visit a Gothic cathedral; we are enraptured by the vertical lines that shoot up towards the sky and draw our eyes and our spirits upwards, while at the same time, we feel small, and yet eager for fullness ... Or when we enter a Romanesque church: we are spontaneously invited to recollection and prayer. We feel as if the faith of generations were enclosed in these splendid buildings. Or, when we hear a piece of sacred music that vibrates the strings of our heart, our soul expands and helped to turn to God. A concert of music by Johann Sebastian Bach, in Munich, directed by Leonard Bernstein, again comes to my mind. After the last piece of music, one of the Cantate, I felt, not by reasoning, but in my heart, that what I heard had conveyed something of the faith of the great composer to me and pressed me to praise and thank the Lord ...

But how many times have paintings or frescoes, the fruit of the faith of the artist, in their forms, their colours, in their light, encouraged us to direct our thoughts to God and nourish in us the desire to draw from the source of all beauty. What a great artist, Marc Chagall, wrote remains true, that for centuries painters have dipped their paintbrush in that coloured alphabet that is the Bible. How many times, then can artistic expressions be occasions to remind us of God, to help our prayer or for the conversion of the heart! Paul Claudel, a poet, playwright, and French diplomat, in the Basilica of Notre Dame in Paris, in 1886, while he was listening to the singing of the Magnificat at Christmas Mass, felt God's presence. He had not entered the church for reasons of faith, but to in search of arguments against Christians, and instead the grace of God worked in his heart.

Benedict XVI
General Audience [transl. Asianews]
August 31, 2011

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Mon. 09/19 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *St. Josaphat* (Ss. Januarius, Bishop, & Companions)

Tue. 09/20 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *Assumption-Windsor* (St. Eustace & Companions, Martyrs)

Wed. 09/21 7:00 PM: High Mass at *St. Josaphat* (St. Matthew, Apostle)

Sun. 09/25 1:00 PM: High Mass at *St. Hyacinth* (Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost)