

**REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
TO THE WASHINGTON, D.C. PATRONS OF THE ARTS IN THE VATICAN MUSEUMS
THE APOSTOLIC NUNCIATURE OF THE UNITED STATES
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2019**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

It is my privilege to welcome you to this Apostolic Nunciature, this “house of the Pope”. As the Apostolic Nuncio, I wish to express to you the paternal affection of the Holy Father, to assure you of his prayers, and to express His Holiness’ deep gratitude for your support of the arts. With you, Pope Francis recognizes art and beauty as means of transmitting the Faith and attracting men and women from all walks of life to the One who is Beauty Himself.

Pope Benedict XVI said that “the language of art is a language of parables, endowed with a special universal openness: the ‘*via pulchritudinis*’ is a path to guide the mind and the heart to the eternal.” (POPE BENEDICT XVI, ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE SCREENING OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM “ART AND FAITH – VIA PULCHRITUDINIS”, 25 OCTOBER 2012)

The recent tragedy at Notre Dame in Paris, one which affected me in a deeply personal way, also provoked genuine sorrow from people around the world, highlighting the need for beauty in our lives. While some were saddened simply because artistic treasures were damaged or lost or that a world landmark was in ruins, others grieved because the cathedral helped them in their quest for an encounter with the Transcendent God. It evoked something in them that brought them serenity, peace, and even the desire to live in a different way.

For the Scholastics, beauty was a transcendental: that is, it pertained to each and every existent thing in so far as it existed at all. The beauty of a thing was a mark of its reality. To be struck by a beautiful work of art is to be transfixed by its reality, to be attracted or captivated by it. Beauty was closely connected with two other ideas: *form* and *splendor*. Works of art not only form a coherent vision, bringing together in the right proportions, colors, materials, compositions or textures, but they also contain that which evokes a sense of wonder, captivating us and drawing us deeper into contemplation.

Beauty attracts. It does not impose. It is not art alone that captivates us; rather, we are drawn by the lives of individuals, whose goodness moves our hearts. Certainly, the lives of the saints offer us an example of this. A beautiful sunset or a view from a mountaintop also lead us to ask: “Who made all these things?” – a question that guides humanity in its search for the Divine. A beautiful cathedral like Notre Dame drew people to contemplate the captivating love of God.

In our Catholic tradition, beauty is also inseparable from truth and goodness. True beauty as the attractiveness of the truly good motivates us to strive for excellence. Certain things attract and inspire us. Beauty motivates us to explore, inquire, reflect, understand, judge, and act. In a mysterious way, beauty helps us hear the call of God to that which is truly good for us.

Saint John says that the *Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us*, and yet the world refused to acknowledge Him as the Truth. It closed its eyes to His Beauty and Goodness. We see in the person of Christ, the Good Shepherd – or, if we translated the Greek *kalos* literally, we would say the Beautiful Shepherd – the One who attracts us and motivates us by the beauty of His love.

Plato wrote that “Beauty has descended from heaven to save us.” Dostoevsky confirmed this intuition, writing that “Beauty will save the world.” More recently, the Russian theologian Pavel Evdokimov asked: “Who will free beauty from those who want to pursue for themselves power, wealth, and dominion over others?” Answering his own question, he suggests that only the experience of beauty in its absolute form – that is, only the unspeakable experience of God – can restore to beauty its original splendor and the yearning that comes from it.

The beauty of an encounter with God – which is often so powerful and profound that it cannot be put into words and images – can be truly liberating. The beauty of Christ, known through such an encounter, draws us to be His disciples in words and action, serving as a remedy against a culture dominated by technology or motivated by pure efficiency.

There is a true evangelizing power in beautiful, Catholic art. Pope Francis invites Catholics to attend to this way of beauty. In his Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, he writes:

Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with splendor and profound joy in the midst of difficulties. Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus. This has nothing to do with fostering an aesthetic relativism which would downplay the inseparable bond between truth, goodness, and beauty, but rather a renewed esteem for beauty as a means of touching the human heart and enabling the truth and goodness of the Risen Christ to radiate within it. If, as Saint Augustine says, we love only that which is beautiful, the incarnate Son, as the revelation of infinite beauty, is supremely lovable and draws us to himself with bonds of love. So a formation in the *via pulchritudinis* ought to be part of our effort to pass on faith. (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 167)

Your generous support as Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums is contributing to the evangelizing mission of the Church – handing on the Faith and helping others to discover the *via pulchritudinis* and experience union with the One who is truly beautiful. Once more, I thank you and wish you a good evening.