

**REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CATHOLIC ART AND LIBRARY
6TH ANNUAL ROMAN GALA
MUSEUM OF THE BIBLE, WASHINGTON, DC
THURSDAY, MAY 10, 2018**

Your Excellencies, Honorable Representatives of the House, Members of the Cabinet and Government, Distinguished Guests, Clergy and Religious, Dear Friends,

It is my distinct privilege to be with you this evening as the National Museum of Catholic Art and Library hosts its 6th Annual Roman Gala and honors those who have made outstanding contributions to society and culture. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to this country, I want to express Pope Francis' heartfelt greetings, spiritual closeness and paternal affection to all gathered here. In a special way, I want to thank Christina Cox for her kind invitation to offer a few words.

This evening I want to reflect with you upon why the National Museum of Catholic Art and Library is so vital. Today, it is becoming increasingly difficult to transmit the faith. The rapid secularization of society, the questioning of perennial truths, and the lack of patience to engage in civil discourse and philosophical debate have made the challenge greater. In contemporary society, marked by a philosophical and practical relativism, "truth" language, used in the Catholic tradition, is off-putting to some; it is viewed as an imposition of values, and yet, there must be a way to communicate the truths of our faith and tradition.

It is here that art and the way of beauty are essential. There is something non-threatening about the beautiful. Beauty attracts. It does not impose. Who would not be moved by the beauty of the Sistine Chapel or the cathedrals of France, Notre Dame and Chartres come immediately to mind? In the Catholic literary tradition, one thinks of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins or Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In the Apostolic Nunciature, we have a beautiful stained-glass window, crafted by Violet Oakley, which depicts scenes from Dante's classic work.

Sometimes the beauty of the Tradition is seen most vividly in the lives of the saints and in heroic men and women. Just gaze upon the love with which the Missionaries of Charity care for the poorest of the poor, and you will see beauty that moves the heart. Having served in Mexico prior to my appointment to the United States, I can testify that the image of the Holy Virgin of Guadalupe is a true evangelizing force. The encounter with the beautiful within our tradition and in nature might lead a person to ask: "Who made all these beautiful things?"

Beauty opens the door to faith, as well as to the true and the good. We live in a world, dominated by technology, the internet, social media and mobile phones, of images. For young people, and our Holy Father wants us to be attentive to them, a sacred image can express much more than can be said in words and can be a dynamic and effective way of transmitting the faith.

The works of art from our Catholic tradition are like parables; they tell the story and teach truths but without so many words so that many can grasp something of the eternal. 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)

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)

The mission of the Museum of Catholic Art and Library is in perfect harmony with the evangelizing efforts of the Church here in the United States and throughout the world. The push toward an ever-more technical and efficient society is leading away from the roots of ancient cultures which were more concerned about being and beauty than usefulness and efficiency. The rediscovery of the *via pulchritudinis*, through painting, sculpture, film, music, and the arts will not only provide an antidote for these ills, but will also foster deeper contemplation, especially of Christ, the Good Shepherd.

Kalos in Greek is the word for both beautiful and good. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Beautiful Shepherd. The beauty of His love, a love which will draw all men to Him (John 12:32), is a saving beauty. Thus, when the oft-quoted, “Beauty will save the world,” is heard, we can think of the Beautiful Shepherd whose love draws us away from the ugliness of sin into embrace of the living God. From His merciful embrace, from the redeeming beauty of Christ, we live, refashioned as masterpieces of God.