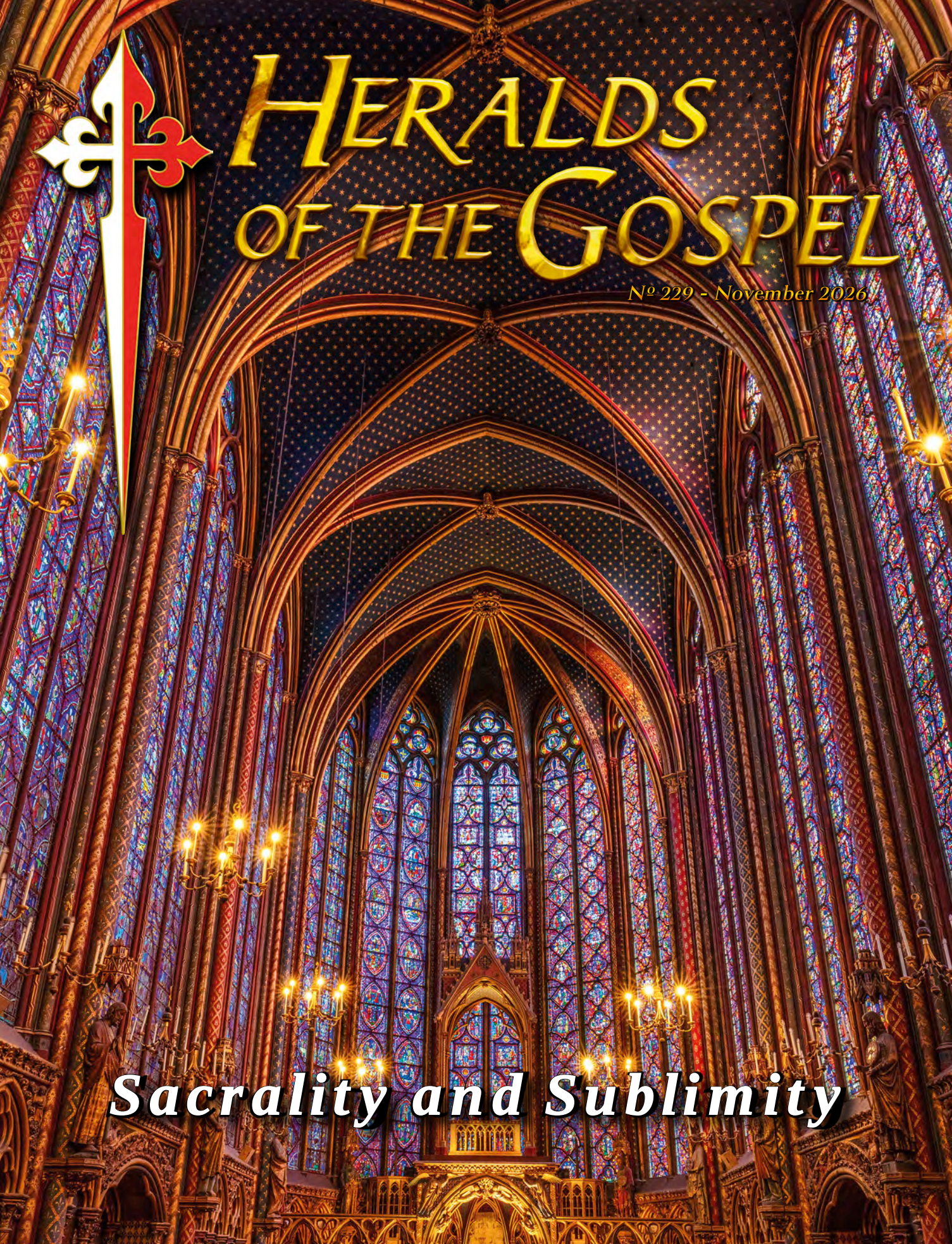


Heralds of the Gospel

Nº 229 - November 2026

Sacrality and Sublimity

Cherished Daughter of the Church and Her Interpreter

It would show great ignorance, even from a merely practical point of view, to deny the power of art. In the Middle Ages, art was the surest auxiliary of mysticism and of the Liturgy; it was the cherished daughter of the Church and her interpreter, charged with expressing her thoughts to the masses, revealing them in cathedral porticoes and altarpieces.

It was art that explained the Gospels to the multitudes and inflamed their enthusiasm; it was art that drew them, in joyful prayer, to the foot of the crib or shook them with sobs at the sight of the weeping groups on the Calvary scenes; art again, which brought them trembling to their knees, on wondrous Easters, before the newly-risen Christ, leaning on His gardener's spade and smiling at Magdalene; or which raised them, in breathless ecstasy on extraordinary Ascensions, to hail their Saviour as He ascended heavenwards, raising a pierced hand, from which rubies shone, to bless them.

But how far off all this seems! Alas! how forsaken, how bloodless the Church is since she lost her interest in art, and since art has withdrawn from her. She has lost her best form of propagation, her surest means of defence.

It would seem that now that she is besieged and pouring water from all sides, she must im-plore the Almighty to send her artists whose works would certainly bring about more conversions and earn her more adherents than the empty refrains which her priests […] from their pulpits pour over the resigned heads of the faithful!

HUYSMANS, Joris-Karl. *L'oblat*. Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1903, p.349-350



Ceremony in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, Caieiras (Brazil)

Leandro Souza

HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

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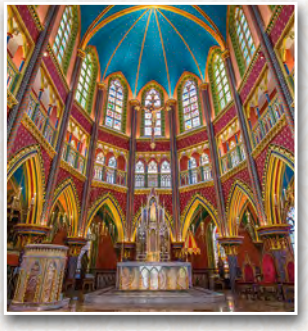
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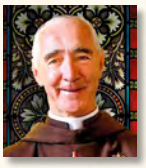
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Caba2011 (CC by-sa 4.0)

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Send your questions to Fr. Ricardo, by email:
ourreadersask@heralds.org



Fr. Ricardo José Basso, EP

Can there be repentant people in hell?

Antonio Borda (via email)

How many obstacles must be cleared away to answer such a brief question!… The mere mention of the word *hell* raises a thousand objections, sentiments and psychological barriers in people's minds: "Hell… Does it really exist?" Or: "Jesus does speak of an eternal hell (cf. Mt 25:41; Mk 9:43–48); but do people actually go there?" And the most common question: "How can such a good God create a punishment so cruel and… eternal?"

Our great advantage in answering this question is the fact that the Holy Catholic Church was not born yesterday. Adorned with a youthfulness spanning two thousand years, she is highly experienced; the issues raised today have, for the most part, already been considered in the past, answered by great Doctors of the Church, and defined by the Church's Magisterium.

The *Catechism* summarizes this topic as follows: "The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death, the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, 'eternal fire'" (CCC 1035). Crystal clear!

Yes, hell exists! It is eternal and not empty: at the very least, a vast number of demons are there (cf. 2 Pt 2:4)…

Upon reading such a statement, modern man – accustomed to viewing everything through the prism of challenge and rebellion – immediately objects: "I cannot believe God would do such a thing!" As if we were more merciful than the Heavenly Father Himself!

In the past, humanity accepted the doctrine that evil persons go to hell; nowadays, if there is a hell, it is because the one who is truly evil – deep down – is God… What an inversion of values!

It is worth noting that "There are no limits to God's mercy, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept His mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss" (CCC 1864).

Yes, going to hell is our own fault… not God's!

Furthermore, the *Catechism* goes on to explain: "Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself. It results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's Kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back" (CCC 1861).

The problem is that today everything tends to be disposable, and modern man wants to put an expiration date even on eternal damnation…

But, ultimately, can there be repentant people in hell?

The only repentance that would be capable of delivering someone from hell is one arising from a contrite acknowledgment of having offended God, accompanied by a resolve to change one's life and an openness, full of trust, to divine mercy. Now, such a thing does not exist in hell! There may be a resentful, rebellious, and hardened remorse, but without any desire for forgiveness.

The *Catechism* adopts the words of St. John Damascene: "There is no repentance for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death" (CCC 393).

Do you know why, Antonio? Because hell and Heaven, in a way, already begin here on earth. Those habitually offend God during their lives become so hardened in evil that they spurn forgiveness – both here and even after death, were it to be offered to them. It is the "mystery of iniquity" (2 Thes 2:7).

May Most Holy Mary, the Gate of Heaven, obtain for us the grace to live a holy life, always maintaining the state of grace in our souls and asking for forgiveness whenever we need it!



The Wing of the Human Spirit

There are mysterious and surprising relationships between certain colours, shapes, sounds, scents, and flavours on the one hand, and certain states of soul, on the other.

A person, for instance, confined in a room with exaggerated shades of red will find his mood affected by some level of feverish agitation. Smelling the scent of incense or inhaling noxious fumes has effects not only on the lungs but even one's frame of mind. The frenetic noise of megacities stands in stark contrast to the soothing silence of cloisters.

The principle that physical factors influence the spirit – the very basis of what we call marketing – leads to two possible stances: a defensive one, aiming to avoid manipulation; and an offensive one, focused on leveraging this reality in the individual and collective pursuit of holiness.

For, as the reader will discover in the following pages, it is possible to use forms, colours, fragrances, and the like to create environments that prepare the way for love of God. Indeed, this is the highest and most fundamental mission of temporal society: to organize the earth to reflect our Heavenly Homeland. Such a vision may well clash with a materialistic conception of reality. Yet, to ask whether the temporal order plays a role on the journey to eternity is tantamount to asking whether God's six-day work of creation matters for salvation…

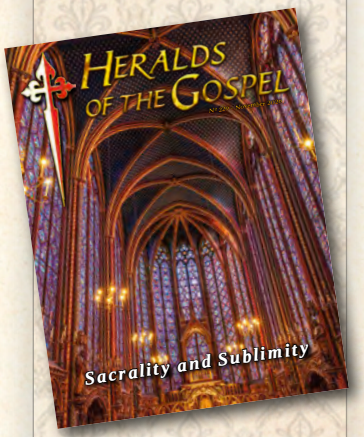
St. Thomas Aquinas (cf. *Summa Theologiæ*, I, q. 2, a. 3) – recognizing that material creation must indeed serve as a path to the Kingdom of Heaven – charted this route when describing the fourth way of proving God's existence. When we state that something is more beautiful or less so, we are establishing a gradation of beauty. Now, this gradation is established only in relation to a maximum – a Supreme Beauty – which serves as a benchmark and is the cause of all that is beautiful. Therefore, the entire hierarchy of beauties forms, in effect, a ladder that leads to Beauty in its essence: God Himself.

Now, if the Church presents herself as the way to salvation – for she was constituted as such by the One who is the Saviour and the Way (cf. Jn 14:6) – it nevertheless falls to the secular order to pave the road that culminates in the Most High. The Church is Jacob's ladder leading to the Throne of the Lord (cf. Gn 28:12). Temporal society, in turn, serves as its handrail – a golden, noble, and strong handrail designed not only to prevent a fall but to draw pilgrims upward.

On the highest rungs of this ladder of beauty, we find the sublime – that ultimate level of the *pulchrum* that already touches upon God. And when this sublime quality fulfils a sacred function or speaks explicitly of the Creator, it is refined into the sacral – the very pinnacle of the sublime. It is, therefore, the task of temporal society to make the invisible Beauty visible through the sublime and the sacral.

God has entrusted man with the task of completing the work of creation, and a privileged means of doing so lies in making St. Thomas's "Fourth Way" increasingly "traversable." It is our mission to repave it and to reattach the golden handrail of this ladder to Paradise.

If, in our times, it is becoming increasingly difficult to persuade by means of the truth – so often reviled – and if it is so challenging to move hearts through the good – so often relativized – then we must raise man towards the Most High through beauty, the unfailing wing of the human spirit.



Sainte-Chapelle, Paris

Photo: Diego Delso (CC by-sa 4.0)

"Via pulchritudinis", a Path to God

So close to God and so accessible to mankind, beauty has always been a link uniting earth and Heaven, time and eternity.

Beyond what the senses perceive

Beauty is the visible form of the good, just as the good is the metaphysical condition of beauty. This was well understood by the Greeks who, by fusing the two concepts, coined a term which embraces both: *kalokagathía*, or beauty-goodness. On this point Plato writes: "The power of the Good has taken refuge in the nature of the Beautiful" (*Philebus*, 65A). […]

Every genuine artistic intuition goes beyond what the senses perceive and, reaching beneath reality's surface, strives to interpret its hidden mystery. The intuition itself springs from the depths of the human soul, where the desire to give meaning to one's own life is joined by the fleeting vision of beauty and of the mysterious unity of things.

ST. JOHN PAUL II.
Letter to Artists, 4/4/1999

Reflection of the infinite divine beauty

This eternal and unchangeable law commands that man himself and all his actions should manifest and imitate, so far as possible, God's infinite perfection for the praise and glory of the Creator. Since man is born to attain this supreme end, he ought to conform himself and through his actions direct all powers of his body and his soul, rightly ordered among themselves and duly subjected to the end they are meant to attain, to the divine Model.

Therefore even art and works of art must be judged in the light of their conformity and concord with man's last end. Art certainly must be listed among the noblest manifestations of human genius. Its purpose is to express in human works the infinite divine beauty of which it is, as it were, the reflection.

PIUS XII. *Musicæ sacræ disciplina*, 25/12/1955

Participation in the creative power of God

God therefore called man into existence, committing to him the craftsman's task. Through his "artistic creativity" man appears more than ever "in the image of God", and he accomplishes this task above all in shaping the wondrous "material" of his own humanity and then exercising creative dominion over the universe which surrounds him. With loving regard, the divine Artist passes on to the human artist a spark of His own surpassing wisdom, calling him to share in His creative power.

ST. JOHN PAUL II.
Letter to Artists, 4/4/1999

Sacred art: the foundation of all art

Finally, the arts modelled on the supreme exemplar of all beauty which is God Himself, from whom is derived all the beauty to be found in nature, are more securely withdrawn from vulgar concepts and more efficaciously rise towards the ideal, which is the life of all art. And how fruitful of good has been the principle of employing them in the service of divine worship and of offering to the Lord everything that is deemed to be worthy of Him, by reason of its richness, its goodness, its elegance of form. This principle has created sacred art, which became and still continues to be the foundation of all profane art.

ST. PIUS X.
Iucunda sane, 12/3/1904

Nourishment for faith, embellishment of the Liturgy

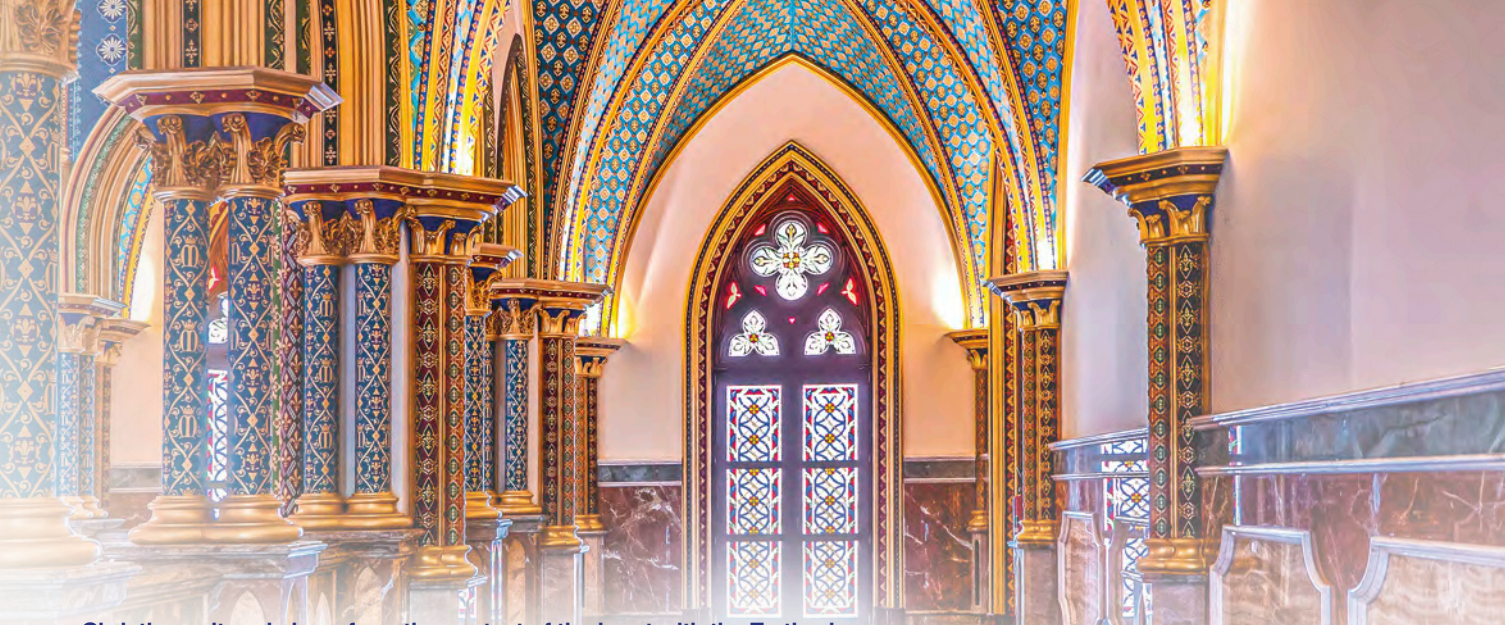
Art has a unique capacity to take one or other facet of the message and translate it into colours, shapes and sounds which nourish the intuition of those who look or listen. It does so without emptying the message itself of its transcendent value and its aura of mystery. […] How many sacred works have been composed through the centuries by people deeply imbued with the sense of the mystery!

The faith of countless believers has been nourished by melodies flowing from the hearts of other believers, either introduced into the liturgy or used as an aid to dignified worship.

ST. JOHN PAUL II.
Letter to Artists, 4/4/1999

Faith: condition for the life of culture

Culture, the whole of our great Christian culture, is born from this con-



Christian culture is born from the contact of the heart with the Truth who is Love. Nor, if faith stays alive, will this cultural inheritance die

Tabor Formation House, Caieiras (Brazil)

tact of the heart with the Truth who is Love. Nor, if faith stays alive, will this cultural inheritance die; rather, it will remain alive and present.

To this day, images still speak to the hearts of believers, they are not relics of the past. Cathedrals are not mediaeval monuments but rather houses of life in which we feel "at home" and where we meet God and one another.

Nor is great music – Gregorian chant, Bach or Mozart – something of the past; rather, it lives on in the vitality of the liturgy and in our faith. If faith is alive, Christian culture can never become "obsolete" but on the contrary will remain alive and present.

BENEDICT XVI.
General Audience, 21/5/2008

The Gospel is the source of inspiration for art

Artists are constantly in search of the hidden meaning of things, and their torment is to succeed in expressing the world of the ineffable.

How then can we fail to see what a great source of inspiration is offered by that kind of homeland of the soul that is religion? Is it not perhaps within the realm of religion that the most vital personal questions are posed, and answers both concrete and definitive are sought? […] It remains true, however, that because of its central doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word of God, Christianity offers artists a horizon especially rich in inspiration. What an impoverishment it would be for art to abandon the inexhaustible mine of the Gospel!

ST. JOHN PAUL II.
Letter to Artists, 4/4/1999

"Via pulchritudinis", a journey of faith

What is capable of restoring enthusiasm and confidence, what can encourage the human spirit to rediscover its path, to raise its eyes to the horizon, to dream of a life worthy of its vocation – if not beauty? […] Precisely because it opens up and broadens the horizons of human awareness, pointing us beyond ourselves, bringing us face to face with the abyss of Infinity, [beauty] can become a path towards the transcendent, towards the ultimate Mystery, towards God. […]

In this regard, one may speak of a *via pulchritudinis*, a path of beauty which is at the same time an artistic and aesthetic journey, a journey of faith, of theological enquiry. […]

The way of beauty leads us, then, to grasp the Whole in the fragment, the Infinite in the finite, God in the history of humanity.

BENEDICT XVI.
Speech, 21/11/2009

The answer to humanity's greatest concerns

The desire for goodness, beauty and truth is rooted in the very DNA of humanity. It is on the basis of this profoundly human aspiration and our centuries-old experience that the Church proposes paths toward a life of dignity and the common good. […] With humility and conviction, the Church shares what she has discovered through the experience of faith: that Jesus Christ provides the answer to the great questions concerning human life and its fulfilment, both in this world and ultimately in eternity. […]

Precisely since "culture" calls to mind "cultivate," just as the etymological roots that both words share suggest, we are rightly called to ask ourselves what it is that we are sowing today, what exactly is flourishing and what is silently withering in our society; what values are we preserving and which are we allowing to die. These are profound and necessary questions that cannot be ignored.

LEO XIV.
Speech, 7/6/2026

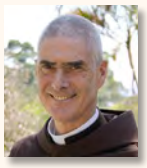
Magazine archive



November 1 – Solemnity of All Saints

(Rv 7: 2-4, 9-14; Ps 24; 1 Jn 3:1-3; Mt 5:1-12)

The Sketch and the Work of Art



Fr. Mario Beccar Varela, EP

Between the divine sketch and the finished work, the spiritual life of each Christian is completed through grace, purification, and constant trust

Anyone who has a project to complete and sets out to realize it always holds a certain idea of the final result. During the process, the creator constantly checks to ensure that the work is drawing closer to that original intention.

Eternal Wisdom could not fail to follow this rule of practical wisdom when creating us with the goal of our full sanctification. But in what does consummate holiness consist? In heavenly beatitude, which is attained precisely through the eight Beatitudes proclaimed on this Solemnity.

The moment we are born, God, as it were, gives us a "sketch" of a marvellous picture, which is to be completed throughout our lives – or even after they have ended, in Purgatory – until it is perfected. Whoever, at the hour of death, presents a fully completed painting is declared "blessed" – in eight respects – by the Divine Judge.

For example, the pure of heart will attain a crystal-clear vision of God – a promise He fulfils in eternal life, yet one that begins in this life. As St. Thomas explains, "these rewards of which the Lord speaks here can be obtained in two ways: perfectly and consummately and thus only in the final homeland – *in patria*; or incipiently and imperfectly and thus by those who are on the way – *in via*. Therefore, the saints possess a certain beginning of that Beatitude."[1]

Those who do not attain the level of this specific beatitude will not possess an elevated "degree of vision," in accordance with the *lumen gloriæ*. In the Father's house there are many dwelling places: some will see more perfectly, others less so. As St. Bonaventure explains,[2] our nature is deformed by sin but reformed by grace; thus, we must purify it in order to ascend to God.

The same principle applies to the other Beatitudes. Those who mourn – Jesus refers here to those who suffer affliction for the love of God, that is, those who are distressed to see Him offended or not loved as He deserves – will be comforted, in this life and the next, by an unshakeable confidence. Their hearts "rest in God." Nothing disturbs them, for, as St. Augustine affirms, "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."[3]

Thus, the Gospel of the Beatitudes encourages us to implore God, echoing the Psalmist: "The Lord will fulfil His purpose for me" (Ps 138:8) and "take me not hence in the midst of my days" (Ps 102:24). This is the petition we must make to the Divine Holy Spirit throughout our lives, through the intercession of Our Lady.

Such is the reality: in His infinite goodness, the Creator offers us the gift of His grace at every moment, thereby being the true Author of our sanctification. The spiritual "work of art" that we must complete before being called to give an account is as much His work as it is ours. It falls to us, simply, to let the Divine Painter use the "brush" of our soul according to His most holy will.



"The painter in his studio", by Pietro Longhi - Getty Center, Los Angeles (California)

Reproduction

[1] ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Super Evangelium S. Matthæi lectura*, c.V, lect.2, n.413.

[2] Cf. ST. BONAVENTURE. *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, c.I, n.6.

[3] ST. AUGUSTINE. *Confessions*. L.I, c.1, n.1.

The Oil of Charity



Fr. Hélio Rufilo, EP

This Sunday's Gospel is part of the sermon delivered by Our Lord on the Mount of Olives, shortly before the Passion, after He had left the Temple and prophesied that not one stone would be left upon another. It is a response filled with parables, addressed to the disciples, who had asked Him: "what will be the sign of Your coming and of the close of the age?" (Mt 24:3).

The keynote of His sermon is the exhortation to daily vigilance while awaiting the end of *a* world – the death of each of us and our coming before God – and the end *of the* earthly world, when the Lord Himself "will come to judge the living and the dead," as we proclaim in the Creed.

This is what we find in the parable of the five wise and the five foolish virgins – or, as the Latin puts it, *fatuæ* (dull-witted, inane, senseless) – virgins. The narrative centres on one of the phases of the celebrations observed for Jewish marriages.

Following legal agreements between the families of the betrothed, it was the groom's duty to prepare the new home. Once all preparations were complete, he would go to the bride's residence to escort her to their new home in a nighttime procession, during which the bridesmaids – the virgins – carried lamps to light the way. Upon arrival, specific blessings were pronounced before ten witnesses, and the marriage union was solemnized. The wedding festivities took place over the following seven days.

Now, in Our Lord's parable, where is the bride?

She is not identified with a single person; rather, she is represented by the ten virgins collectively – signifying the entire Church Militant, as St. Augustine argues[1] – journeying toward an eternal betrothal as yet unconsummated.

All Christian souls bear the title of *virgin* – as St. Paul declares: "I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride" (2 Cor 11:2) – because they must preserve the integrity of faith and purity of heart. This entails abstaining from the misuse of the senses, shunning iniquity, and performing good works – symbolized by the lamps.

Yet, it is not enough for these lamps to shine "before men" (Mt 5:16a); their light must lead others to glorify the "Father who is in Heaven" (Mt 5:16b). In other words, our actions must be directed toward our ultimate end: God Himself. Therefore, the works that endure beyond the sleep of death – that moment when all of us, whether wise or foolish virgins, "nod off" and "fall asleep" – are those springing from a heart filled with piety, a heart that always carries the oil of charity with it.

While we are still awake, let us be sure to store up this oil and thus enter with the Bridegroom into the eternal wedding feast. There, once the uncertainties and afflictions of this valley of tears have passed, the words of the Psalm will be fulfilled: "As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied" (63:6). ✣

It is not enough for our lamps to shine "before men"; their light must lead others to glorify the "Father who is in Heaven"

[1] Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE. *Sermon 93*, n.2.



Ricardo Castelo Branco

The wise virgins - Trinità dei Monti Church, Rome

Gratitude and Rebellion



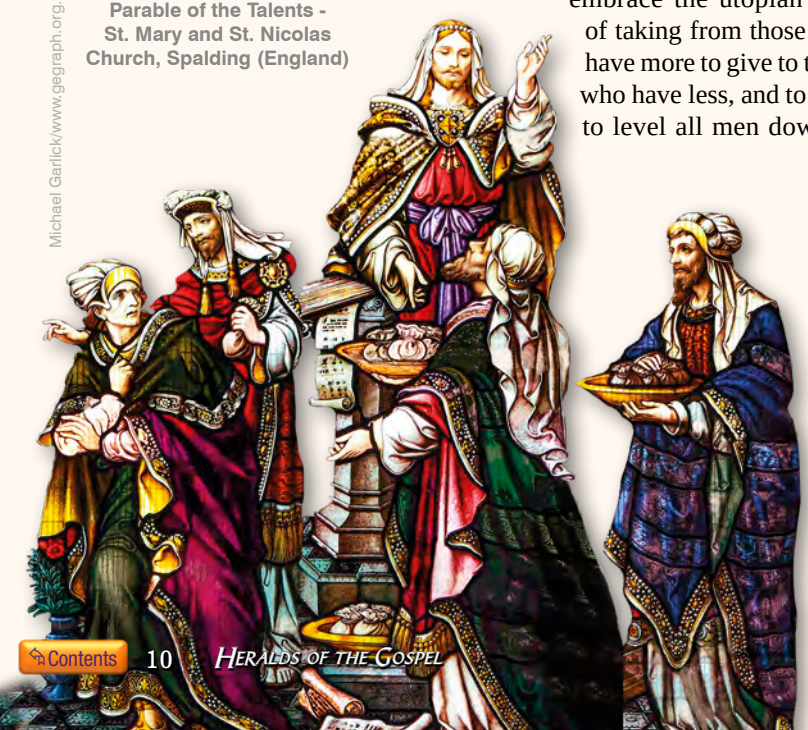
Fr. Lucas Garcia Pinto, EP

In a world that proclaims a false equality, Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that God bestows gifts unequally

The life of Our Lord Jesus Christ on earth marked a "before and after" in history and influenced humanity from every standpoint, including our vocabulary. Proof of this is the Parable of the Talents, proclaimed this Sunday. The Divine Master's teaching left such an indelible mark on the human soul that the word *talent* took on a new meaning.

In Jesus's time, the talent was not only a unit of weight but also a monetary measure, valued at six thousand denarii. Considering that a denarius was the wage for a day's work (cf. Mt 20:1–2) and that an ordinary man worked about three hundred days a year, a single talent was equivalent to just over twenty years of labour! Thus, the scene depicted by the Savior illustrates His benevolence and generosity toward humanity – gifts that are entirely gratuitous, unmerited, and disproportionate.

Furthermore, the inequality with which the Lord distributes His gifts is striking. The modern world champions absolute egalitarianism, indoctrinating successive generations to loathe hierarchy, to embrace the utopian idea of taking from those who have more to give to those who have less, and to seek to level all men down to the lowest common denominator. The God-Man thinks very differently!…



Parable of the Talents - St. Mary and St. Nicolas Church, Spalding (England)

Michael Garlick/www.geograph.org.uk (CC by-sa 2.0)

In the parable, the master entrusts true fortunes to the three servants – even to the one who receives the least – giving "to each according to his ability" (Mt 25:15). Much like someone filling various vessels with a precious liquid, God bestows a plenitude of His gifts upon everyone, according to the measure each can contain.

Who is better? The one who receives more, or the one who receives less? In this specific case, the less favoured one was the most wicked… because goodness lies not in numbers or amounts, but in faithfulness to the master. This is manifested in the attitude of the first servant: "Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five" (Mt 25:16). He acts with readiness and dedication, employing the talents he received to bear fruit for his master. And, "Likewise, the one who received two [talents] made another two" (Mt 25:17).

In the third servant's alleged "fear," however, we perceive a mask for profound selfishness and a hidden spirit of rebellion. He not only disdains the master by burying the talent he received, but also seeks to infect others with his resentment, publicly blaming the master for his own wickedness: "I knew you were a demanding person" (Mt 25:24). In his distorted view, the master is to blame for his failures, and he himself is the victim of the gifts he received.

In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus immortalized two families of souls: those who, moved by gratitude, strive to repay divine goodness through dedication and service to His Kingdom; and the second, made up of the egalitarians – rebellious, insubordinate, and ungrateful for God's generosity – who seek to blame Him for their own errors. To the former, more will be given and they will have abundance, but for the latter, "there will be wailing and grinding of teeth" (Mt 25:30).

(Ez 34:11-12, 15-17; Ps 23; 1 Cor 15:20-26, 28; Mt 25:31-46)

"My Kingship is not of this world"... yet



Fr. Antonio Jakoš, EP

The Divine Redeemer is King by right acquired through His Passion, but He is also King by virtue of His omnipotence, exercising dominion over both Heaven and earth. On earth, however, He does not impose Himself upon the sinners who reject Him; out of mercy, He grants them a time of grace for conversion.

This world is, therefore, like a stronghold that His faithful subjects are called to conquer. When Our Lord declared to the infamous Pilate, "My kingship is not of this world" (Jn 18:36), He was not pronouncing a definitive verdict; for He proclaimed that His universal Kingdom would indeed encompass the world, in fulfilment of the very prayer He addressed to the Eternal Father: "Thy Kingdom come" (Mt 6:10).

In part, this Kingdom has already arrived: it exists within the Holy Catholic Church, that immortal institution born from the side pierced by Longinus' lance, as the King breathed His last upon the Cross. Yet, will the definitive Kingdom ever come? Most certainly. The Lord's Prayer – that perfect petition offered by the Son to the Father – is not conditional.

In the Old Testament, one can discern a foreshadowing of the Lord's Prayer in the words of the Psalm: "When Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the ground" (104:30). There is also the promise made by St. Louis de Montfort[1] regarding the future coming of the Reign of Mary. Nevertheless, it appears that the fullness of Christ's reign has yet to be realized in this world – not due to any lack of power on His part, but because of the contingency of creatures in fully conforming themselves to the Creator.

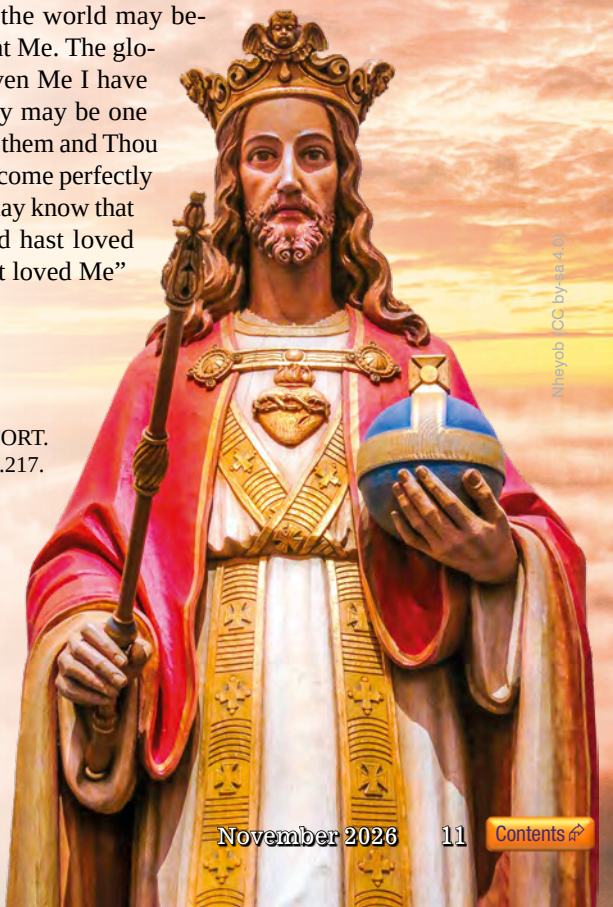
Jesus cannot be reduced to the level of a Herod, reigning over subjects who prefer to praise Barabbas. The fitting adornment for a king is to have subjects who match his greatness. Had Our Lord assented to being crowned on Palm Sunday, He would have compromised His own majesty, for He would have been the Lord of criminals, opportunists, usurers, sinners, blasphemers, the sacrilegious, usurpers, petty politicians, cynics, the envious, slanderers, traitors, and conspirators…

He chose to be King to bring joy to His subjects, sparing no sacrifice to do so – to the point that the only request the Father denied the Son-King was: "if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Mt 26:39). Such is the extent of God's infinite love for mankind.

The perfect joy Our Lord desires for us consists in complete conformity with Him. Once this goal is reached, the Kingdom of Christ will be established, and His subjects will share in a somehow infinite jubilation – a mysterious and unfathomable marvel of God's generosity, not yet fully unveiled by theology. This is what Jesus asks of the Father:

"That they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and Thou in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me and hast loved them even as Thou hast loved Me" (Jn 17:21-23). ✣

The adornment worthy of a king is to have subjects who match his greatness



Nheyob (CC by-sa 4.0)

Christ the King - St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Cathedral, Peoria (Illinois)

[1] Cf. ST. LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNION DE MONTFORT. *True Devotion to Mary*, n.217.

Constant Vigilance: Watch!



Fr. Rafael Schindler, EP

It is absolutely essential that we do not fail in our endeavour to attain glory, lest we will have lived in vain

The liturgical seasons we celebrate throughout the year allow the souls of the faithful to vividly experience the specific graces of the various events of salvation history commemorated in them. Therefore, it is not merely – nor primarily – a mere recalling of past events, but rather a representation of them in the sense of making something once latent present again.

As we know, Advent points toward the event of the Nativity, as well as the Second Coming of the Lord – the Church's great expectation. It is a deeply Marian season, for it was through Mary that Jesus came into the world – this world whose days will end at the close of time, when the Virgin's Son comes to bring history to a close and judge the living and the dead.

Uncertainty is a striking characteristic of life in this valley of tears: unforeseen events, disappointments, dashed expectations, endless waits, or unpleasant surprises – all manner of contingencies. Yet, in our daily lives, we possess one inescapable certainty: eternity awaits us, and will ultimately enfold us in its definitive embrace. Indeed, we shall be placed either at the Supreme Judge's right or left hand (cf. Mt 25:31–46), which implies only two options: elevation to Heaven to enjoy the beatific vision for all eternity, or the fatal plunge into hell. *Tertium non datur*: there is no third possibility.

Therefore, it is absolutely essential that we do not fail in our endeavour to attain glory; otherwise, we will have lived in vain, offending God and ruining His plan. It is a dilemma of utmost importance. That is why this Sunday's Gospel is so clear, concise, and insistent in urging us to keep unceasing watch, placing us in a state of constant vigilance.

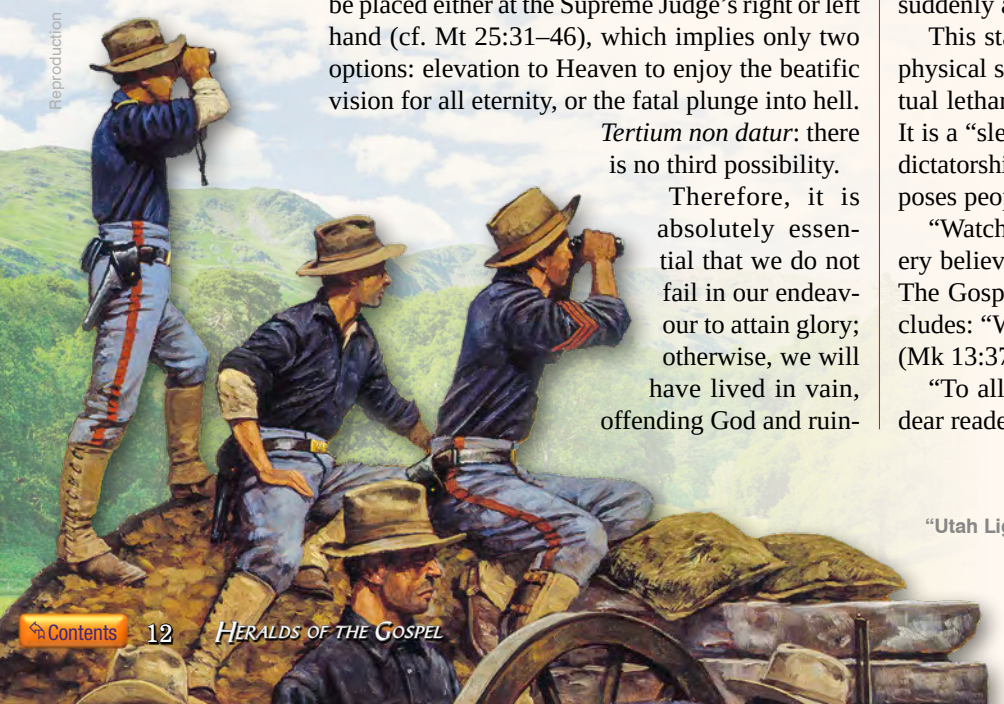
Anyone who thinks that prayer alone suffices to obtain the graces we need from God is mistaken. In another passage of the Gospel, St. Mark himself records these words of the Lord: "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (14:38). The well-known parable of the wise and foolish virgins offers a similar lesson (cf. Mt 25:1–13). Indeed, vigilance precedes the practice of prayer; the latter necessarily requires the caution of preparing the spirit so that prayer may be fruitful, rather than merely occasional or a matter of routine.

A lack of vigilance while awaiting the master – or, as another parable recounts, the failure to guard against the arrival of a thief (cf. Mt 24:43) – is what is highlighted in today's Gospel: "Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping" (Mk 13:35–36).

This state of being "asleep" refers not only to physical slumber but, above all, to a certain spiritual lethargy that weakens the spiritual faculties. It is a "sleep" often associated with relativism – a dictatorship that stifles spiritual combat and predisposes people to compromise with evil.

"Watch!" This is an invaluable counsel for every believer, every family, and every community. The Gospel for this First Sunday of Advent concludes: "What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'" (Mk 13:37).

"To all." Therefore, it applies to you as well, dear reader of these reflections. ✣



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"Utah Light Artillery" United States National Guard

Conquering England with Chant and Enchantment

Forty Benedictine monks, crowded together on a small vessel, watched as the island they sought to conquer – a fearsome place they deemed the abode of the dead – emerged from the mists of the northern sea. In that year of 597, England appeared before the missionaries, shrouded in fog.

The grim reputation of these people had reached as far as Rome, whence the religious men had set out by order of Pope St. Gregory the Great. It was said that the island's inhabitants ate their enemies' hearts, spoke a sinister and incomprehensible language, and lived in the very place where the dead went, to suffer the torments of hell.

Yet the monks were obeying clear papal directives: they were to evangelize the Angles. Their method? To sing Church melodies – specifically, what would later become known as *Gregorian chant*. Augustine, who led the mission and whom we invoke today as St. Augustine of Canterbury, knew how to stir the hardened hearts of the men he would encounter. His secret was the manifestation of beauty.

Upon landing in pagan territory, the sons of St. Benedict realized the situation was not quite as apocalyptic as expected, and they managed to secure an audience with the monarch, Ethelbert of Kent, a Jutish ruler.

The meeting was a grand affair. In a clearing within a nearly impenetrable forest, surrounded by his nobles, the sovereign awaited the religious men. Ethelbert felt at home, surrounded by rugged oaks and his even more rugged warriors, with their light-coloured eyes and massive builds, descendants of sea rovers who, brandishing their axes with ravenous vigour in their giant arms, had made the Britannic island tremble for many decades.

The missionaries, for their part, also behaved as if they were at home in the monastery. They made their way to the king in a solemn, sung procession, preceded by a large silver cross and a painting of Christ. Thus, before the astonished court, an army of forty monks came into view and advanced, chanting continuous and captivating Gregorian hymns in Latin.

All the subtleties of the chant, all its mysterious and eloquent fluctuations, all those unfamiliar words filled the souls of the listeners. The hearts of those people thrilled at such beauty. The ground was prepared for the preaching, and St. Augustine spoke at length of the mystery of a God who, having become Man, allowed Himself to be sacrificed in a horrific death for the salvation of those who had gone astray: "Jesus Christ has opened, with His Blood, the gates of a new Kingdom for those who believe in Him," he concluded.

Shortly thereafter, King Ethelbert was baptized, along with many of his officials, and on Christmas of that same year, ten thousand people would be born to grace.

Community life, Latin and Gregorian chant: this was enough to drain the ancient swamps of Anglo-Saxon paganism. And on that land, prepared by beauty, a spark of preaching was all it took to set it ablaze with faith.

For words can enter open hearts, but they cannot open them. Integrity of life and splendid Liturgy: these are the keys that throw open the doors of even the most hopelessly locked souls. St. Augustine of Canterbury knew this, and armed himself with beauty, Latin and prayer. ✣



François Boulay

Ceremony, Latin and Gregorian chant: this was enough to free the Anglo people from paganism

St. Gregory the Great blesses St. Augustine of Canterbury - St. Patrick's Basilica, Montreal



The Greatest Alms for Humanity

In an age when the good, the true, and the beautiful are retreating from the face of the earth, we must raise the banner of "pulchrum" aloft, and become the almsgivers of God's beauties.

Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

While passing through a certain place, I opened a door and came upon a cat sitting on its haunches, its tail curled beside its front paws with the tip pointing upward. It looked at me as if it were a prince… I felt an urge to take a photograph to show people the natural *pulchrum* present in that animal.

How is it possible for a cat – incapable of understanding art, style, or nobility, lacking as it does the faculty of reason – to assume such an impeccable posture, possessing a certain indefinable air of elegance and distinction?

If we leave the world of felines and examine bees, we are struck by the extraordinary organization of the honeycomb, as well as the tenacity of the insects themselves, always in search of flowers from which to extract the necessary nectar to produce honey. A bee never attempts to take nectar from a plastic flower; on the contrary, they pass it by without even drawing close, because their instinct "informs" them that it is artificial.

Just as animals have perfect and unerring instincts, man possesses an instinct that leads him to discern and to desire what is beautiful, good and true

Animals have perfect and unerring instincts; yet man, too – the highest of all material creatures – possesses unerring instincts.

If we approach a child's cradle, we find a tiny being whose intelligence and consciousness have not yet developed. Nevertheless, such are its instincts that, if presented with a small ball and a large one, it will choose the large one; if offered a white ball and a golden one, it will reach out for the gold first and the white one only afterwards.

Why is this so? It is the result of a sense present in every innocent soul – a sense that leads one, even before attaining the full use of reason, to manifest preferences and to constantly seek the best and the *pulchrum*. Later, when the faculty of reasoning awakens, the child will know how to distinguish – even without being taught – between truth and falsehood, good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly.



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How is it possible for a cat to assume such an impeccable posture, displaying an air of elegance and distinction?

What is the beautiful?

St. Thomas defines the beautiful thus: "*Id cuius ipsa apprehensio placet*,"[1] that is, anything a person apprehends and finds pleasing, producing an aesthetic emotion in the depths of their soul.

However, due to original sin, the human spirit has become fallible and often errs, forming subjective opinions and tastes far removed from standards of perfection. Regarding the objective criterion of beauty, Scholasticism defines it as the splendour of form upon the proportionate parts of matter.[2]

For example, a bust of Our Lady carved from a block of marble is objec-

tively beautiful if the figure is so expressive and integral that it forms a harmonious whole. If the sculptor creates an image with only half a face, or without a nose, or with an enormous ear, it cannot be called a beautiful work, for it lacks the splendour of form: it is fragmented, incomplete, or disproportionate.

Such is the philosophical definition of beauty as applied to works of art. The latter achieve the ideal standard when subjective and objective beauty harmonize, offering complete satisfaction to the beholder.

If we take a further step and ascend to the supernatural realm, we find the theological definition of beauty as the splendour of truth and the splendour of goodness. Beauty, according to the Thomistic tradition, is the splendour of all the transcendentals united.[3]



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By divine inspiration, St. Joan of Arc responded to the malicious question of the pseudo-inquisition with luminous elegance and grace. Therein lies the splendour of truth, "pulchrum"!

"The judgement of St. Joan of Arc", by Antony Serres - Fine Arts Museum of Bordeaux (France)

To truly grasp the splendour of truth, let us imagine a public square where a non-believer and a Catholic are debating. The latter presents sound arguments, citing Scripture, and it is admirable to watch him defend doctrine point by point. Yet, in this scene, there is no stirring splendour – nothing that could properly be called *pulchrum*.

However, if we turn to the trial of St. Joan of Arc, we find a defenceless nineteen-year-old maiden – unversed in theology – being judged by a pseudo-Inquisition made up of learned and intellectually prepared men. When one of the judges asked if she was in a state of grace – clearly intending to trap her – she replied: "If I am not, may God place me in it; and if I am, may God deign to so keep me."[4]

Had she declared with all assurance, "I am in a state of grace!", she would have contradicted Catholic doctrine, which holds that no one can naturally possess absolute certainty of their being in the state of grace or not. Conversely, had she stated, "I am not," she would have confessed to mortal sin, thereby undermining the credibility of her mission. How was one to answer such a malicious question? The Holy Spirit inspired her, and she managed to respond with luminous elegance and grace. Therein lies the splendour of truth – *pulchrum*!

> *Beauty can be defined as the splendour of truth and of goodness. or again as the splendour of all the transcendentals united*

The same applies to goodness. Let us look at examples once more.

A beggar woman is sitting on the steps of a church. The manager of a large commercial enterprise walks by, takes his wallet from his pocket, and gives her a gold coin. Undoubtedly, this is a praiseworthy act of charity, performed with the desire to help the impoverished woman; yet it is not beautiful – for, given the donor's vast wealth, the offering means little or nothing to him. It would be truly beautiful if that were his only coin – like in the episode of the widow's mite, which earned Our Lord's praise, because that widow gave all she had to live on (cf. Mk 12:42–44).

What, then, constitutes true beauty in the matter of almsgiving?

Let us imagine another scene. On a night of heavy snowfall, with the temperature two degrees below zero, a poor beggar shivers with cold by the roadside. A horseman, clad in high-quality warm clothing, reins in his mount, dismounts, and – removing his coat, gloves, and even his boots – offers them to the destitute man, saying: "Cover yourself, or you may well die." Then, unshod and dressed only in his

shirt and breeches, he mounts his horse and rides away.

It is precisely the act of giving all that makes the gesture truly beautiful. Such a radiant act of virtue allows us to grasp the beautiful, for present within the heroism with which it is performed is the splendour of goodness – and, consequently, of holiness.

Indeed, the splendour of truth and goodness manifests itself above all in that which reflects God – Beauty itself – in an integral and complete way; it draws us closer to Him and unites us to Him, allowing us to almost "touch" Him.

More important than speaking or doing is being

One might ask what is the use of these reflections, and whether our contribution to the universal Church should not consist far more in writing literary works, doctrinal books, or manifestos – or in engaging in apostolate activities by expounding on the Catholic Faith with clarity and logic. Undoubtedly, all such actions are useful and even indispensable, yet they are insufficient to meet the needs of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Imagine a group of people who knew nothing about music and had never seen an orchestra perform, yet each one of them was determined to learn an instrument – flute, trumpet, cello… And so the teacher tells them: "To understand music, you must find your place in a scale of notes that ascend and descend by semitones; the Greeks had a somewhat different music theory, and so on… Now, take this score and perform Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, for I have already explained to you what notes are."

Would these students manage to play the piece? What should a good master do? After explaining musical theory, he ought to show his pupils a top-tier orchestra performing Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Only then – drawing on what they had seen and heard, and having already conveyed the concept of melody – should he gather the aspiring musicians and begin rehearsals.



Sérgio Miyasaki

There is no better or closer representative the Lord than a saint, for saints are the paramount example of goodness, truth, and beauty on the face of the earth.

Msgr. João in February of 2010

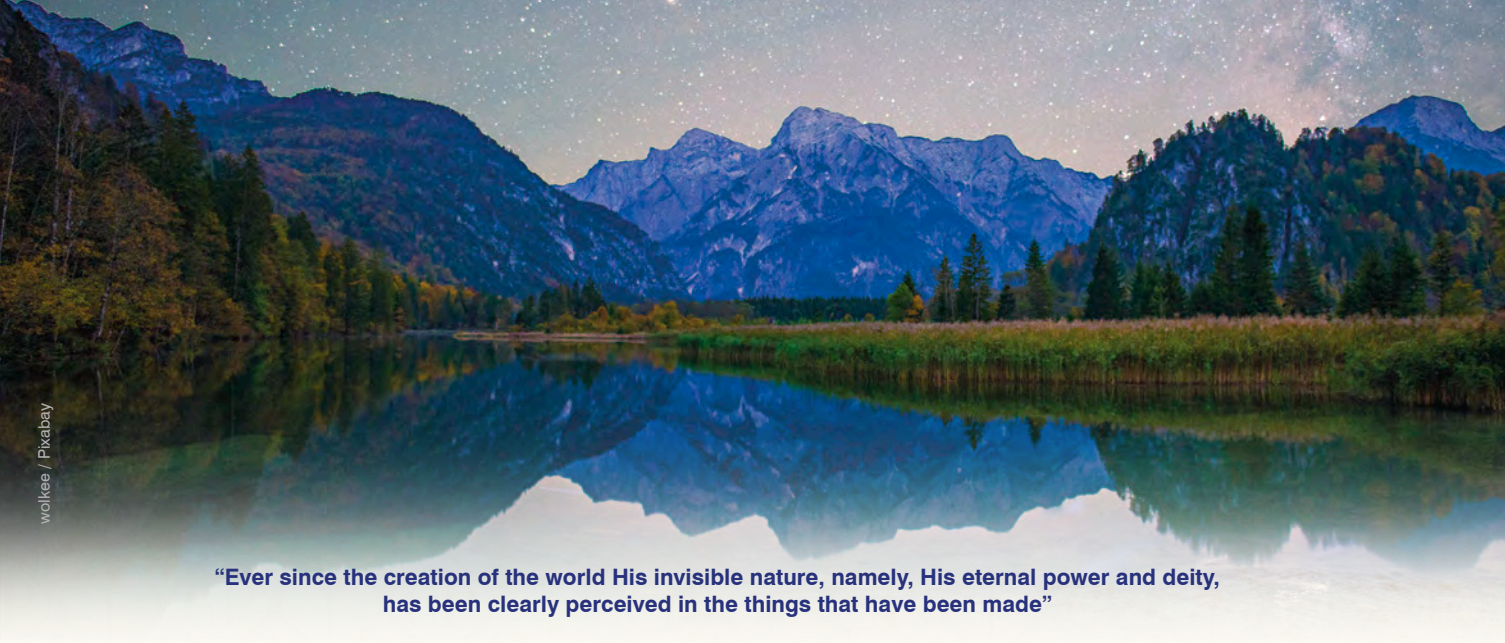
A radiant act of virtue allows us to see beauty, for the heroism with which it is performed contains the splendour of goodness: holiness

Likewise, one cannot conceive what a true Roman Catholic should be based merely on knowledge of Church doctrine. It is a matter of translating the truth – once contemplated and understood – into concrete acts, customs, and ways of being. Herein lies the importance of the living symbol; for of all that exists, the greatest symbol of God for man is man himself, created in His image (cf. Gn 1:27). For this reason, there is nothing more representative of – or closer to – the Lord than a saint, for the saint is the supreme example of goodness, truth, and beauty on the face of the earth.

It is, therefore, the moral duty of every Catholic to bear faithful witness to what they profess, not only by passing on what the Church teaches, but by embodying that teaching. Hence, the most important aspect of apostolic action does not consist in speaking or in doing, but in being! Only then can they go out into the world and contribute to the *consecratio mundi* spoken of in *Lumen Gentium*[5] – that is, the sanctification of the temporal order – aware that only that which is sacral can make other things sacral. Through gestures, attitudes and behaviour, through the Liturgy carried out well, through art and beauty, people will more easily draw near to God and find the true light that points the way to holiness and goodness.

Almsgivers of God's beauties

In everything that God has created, among the lower orders of nature – minerals, plants and animals – He has embedded symbolism to enable human beings, by casting their eyes upon each thing, to understand something that they do not see. Thus, the entire visible universe – the birds, the mosquitoes, the trees, the sun, the wind, the sand, the earth, the waters, the moun-



wolkee / Pixabay

"Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made"

tains, the ice – is a mirror, an image and a symbol of the invisible universe.

That is why St. Paul states in his Epistle to the Romans: "Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (1:20).

If everything has been given to us by the Creator, it is our duty to give everything back to Him, interpreting these signs and symbols, and using them as a means to lead others out of their selfishness and to the knowledge of God, loving Him as much as is possible on this earth.

Our age is in want of beauty, and lives in utter spiritual poverty and a complete lack of virtue; there is no longer any decency, and goodness has withdrawn from the face of the earth. What social class does not need truth and holiness? How much distress, how much anxiety! How many crises, how many threats! What drama, and what tragedy!

We must satisfy this hunger for the supernatural by nourishing in souls the virtues and gifts bestowed through Baptism.

Amidst the chaos and moral decay of the modern world, we must place our trust in Our Lady and raise the banner of *pulchrum* aloft, becoming almsgivers of God's beauties.

It falls to us to ensure that everyone, both the poor and the rich, of noble or common class, prisoner or free, both the lowly and the great, the destitute and the opulent, may all have the marvellous within reach and find an environment that reflects the ideals they cherish. To clothe, feed, support, and protect spiritually – this is the most essential charity, the greatest alms one can offer humanity, in accordance with the precept Our Lord gave us: "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12); "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mk 12:31).

To be happy we must seek "pulchrum" and holiness, love the truth, and embrace the Gospel, that is, practising and not simply admiring it

This is also how to prevent people from losing hope and surrendering to the devil, following the paths of sin and vice. Only aesthetic emotion, on the one hand, and moral emotion, on the other, lead to lasting happiness. The path to happiness lies in striving for both *pulchrum* and holiness, loving the truth, and embracing the Gospel – truly living it rather than merely admiring it.

This was affirmed by the Second Vatican Council and later cited by John Paul II in his *Letter to Artists*: "Beauty, like truth, brings joy to the human heart and is that precious fruit which resists the erosion of time, which unites generations and enables them to be one in admiration!"[6]

To instead erect a barrier that denies the poor access to beauty would be to commit the greatest crime imaginable, for this would mean "killing" humanity itself. ✣

Excerpts from oral expositions given between 1999 and 2007

[1] ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiæ*. I-II, q.27, a.1, ad 3.

[2] Cf. ST. ALBERT THE GREAT. *In De divinis nominibus*, c.IV, solutio, n.72.

[3] Cf. GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, OP, Réginald. *Les perfections divines*. 4.ed. Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et ses Fils, 1936, p.299.

[4] BORDONOVE, Georges. *Les grandes heures de l'Histoire de France. Jeanne d'Arc et la Guerre de Cent Ans*. Paris: Pygmalion; Gérard Watelet, 1994, p.235.

[5] Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Lumen Gentium*, n.34.

[6] SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Message to Artists*; ST. JOHN PAUL II. *Letter to Artists*, n.11.

Beauty and Sacrality

The Helm of History

The sacral man transcends the metaphors of the Most High and encounters Him above them. Moreover, he imitates the Almighty by building a world that aims to represent divine perfections.



Artur Pereira

Why is it that, when we think of Christendom, we can find common elements in the towers of a cathedral, the traditional attire of a people, or heraldic symbols? Is there a certain confluence between the Benedictine habit, the practice of courtesy, and the refined cuisine of a civilization?

How can we define that sort of aura which permeated Catholic society – an aura that remains, to this day, both the glory of Europe and the object of nostalgic longing for it? What is its name?

Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira called it *sacrality*.[1]

Reminiscences of the divine

For Dr. Plinio, "the sacral is anything that possesses special qualities capable of recalling the supreme attributes of God."[2]

It is not difficult to find these reminiscences of the divine around us. The Creator made the task easier for us by leaving behind a world filled with His "fingerprints." Who does not glimpse the immensity of God in the vastness of the oceans? Who does not encounter the strength of the Almighty in the lion, and the everlasting nature of the Eternal in towering mountains? How can one fail to discover the Invisible One in the radiant light of the sun?

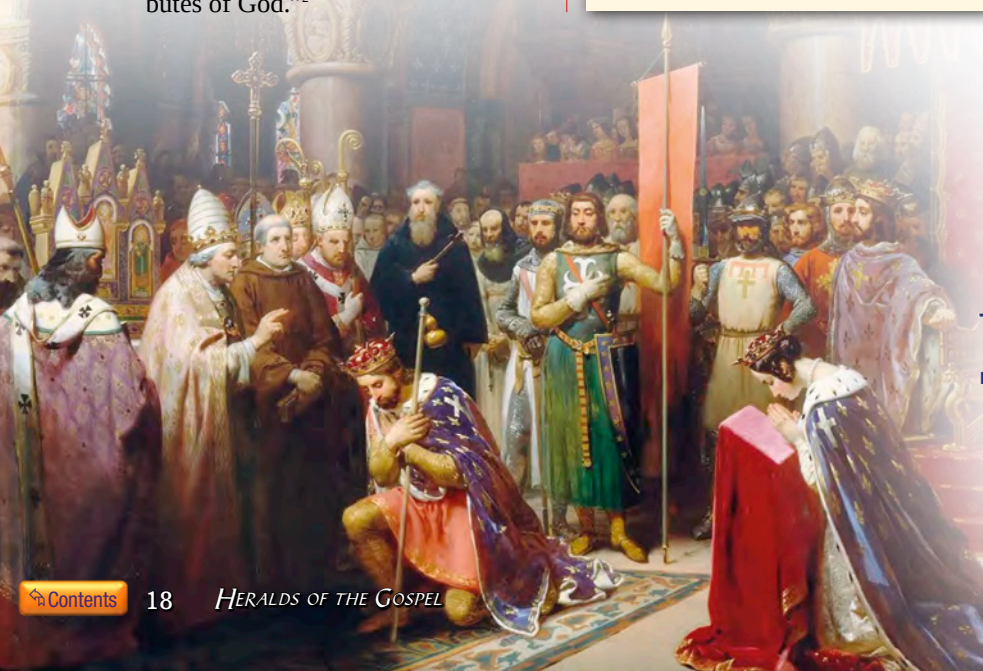
The sacral is that which has special qualities capable of evoking the supreme attributes of God, whether in creation or in human works

The man with a sacral spirit knows how to ascend these metaphors of the Most High and find Him above them. Moreover, he imitates the Almighty by building a world that aims to reflect divine perfections.

Thus, in that Christendom evoked earlier, the tolling of bells resonated as an echo of the divine voice, rather than merely serving as a signal to gather for assemblies. A king shone as a ruler, yet was much more than that: he was a kind of constable for the Lord of Hosts. A fine delicacy served as nourishment for the spirit even more than for the body. The crowns clearly proclaimed their highest mission, namely, to uphold the cross of Christ. And the naves of the Gothic church rendered expressions of sacrality in stone: their arches and ribs came together to point towards Heaven.

Marvellous, too, were the ceremonies that accompanied every sphere of

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There was, in Christian Civilization, a sort of aura that permeated society; it was reflected in every ambit of human life and is still the glory of Europe and the object of its nostalgia: sacrality

"Louis VII receives the oriflamme in Saint-Denis", by Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse - Museum of French History, Versailles

human activity. The buying and selling of land was conducted with solemnity – and even pomp. Even the imposition of prison sentences was carried out with ceremony, and the knighting of a warrior followed a rite rich in symbolism. What, then, of weddings, the acclamation of kings, and papal enthronements? All this pageantry was intended to highlight the grandeur of the act being performed, underscoring to the onlookers that it was taking place in the presence of God.

The two wings of enthusiasm

The brief sketch outlined here so far may seem, to some, a bit ethereal… How, then, to characterize a person filled with this sacral spirit – what distinguishing mark sets him apart?

For Dr. Plinio, that mark is *enthusiasm*: a kind of transport of admiration and love in view of the hierarchy of the created order and its magnificence.

Now, hierarchy implies superiorities and, consequently, inferiorities… Well, a soul pervaded by enthusiasm overflows with *veneration* when contemplating what is superior to it; yet, when it lovingly stoops toward what is similar or inferior, it unfolds in *tenderness*.

Let us illustrate this with a photograph from the last century. The image shows Queen Elizabeth II in a carriage, smiling at her subjects. One detail, however, catches the eye: a little boy gazing – rapt and almost in an attitude of prayer – at the passing of the English sovereign.

The scene captivated Dr. Plinio. A beautiful image of a soul filled with sacral veneration, that "golden boy" – as he called him – "came to see that there is something in life that vastly transcends the immediate surroundings, the vulgarity of everyday existence, […] it is a manifestation of the highest metaphysical values, expressed in the pomp of royalty."[3]

That boy, an image of unpretentious enthusiasm, was "capable of being utterly enchanted by the greatness of something other than himself."[4]


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A soul pervaded by enthusiasm overflows with veneration when contemplating what is superior to it; yet, when it lovingly stoops toward what is similar or inferior, it unfolds in tenderness

Photograph of Queen Elizabeth II commented on by Dr. Plinio

> *Such are sacral souls: they know how to love the sublimity of their superiors and their own smallness; they live on the joy of veneration*

Such are sacral souls: they know how to love both the sublimity of their superiors and their own smallness. In the presence of what transcends them, they give thanks for being lower and for the joy of being able to admire. They live on the joy of veneration – a sentiment that led St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus to exclaim, in a burst of enthusiasm: "O Mary, if I were the Queen of Heaven and You were Thérèse, I would want to be Thérèse, so that You might be the Queen of Heaven."[5]

Conversely, superiors feel *tenderness* toward those beneath them and lavish care upon them as if they were their own children. A classic example of this tenderness can be found in countless episodes from the *Ancien Régime* – an era decadent in many respects, yet still strongly influenced by the Church and, as a result, imbued with a sacral spirit.

The renowned historian Lenotre[6] recounts an incident that took place at Versailles. An expectant lady, having travelled from afar and grown exhausted from walking, was looking for a place on the terrace to rest. The young man accompanying her, spotting a stone bench where two distinguished ladies were conversing, hastened to secure a spot there. Moments later, however, he discovered he was in the presence of the King's wife, Marie Antoinette! Flustered, the visitor tried to apologize for his presumption but was immediately interrupted by a kind gesture from the queen; she insisted that his companion take a seat, but not before ordering a footman to bring a cushion, which she herself arranged on the bench, saying: "This marble is too cold for you right now, Madame; your condition requires the utmost care."

A symphony of admirations

Thus, another aspect of the sacred relationship emerges: the reciprocity of admiration. Superiors respect and honour their subordinates, just as they are respected and honoured by them.

As St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us,[7] every person possesses unique qualities that make him, in some respect, worthy of admiration. Our Lord left us the supreme example of this; though He was the God-Man, He also admired the centurion's faith and the innocence of little children (cf. Lk 7:9; Mk 10:14).

This symphony of admiration – the ascending and descending stairs of human relationships – is also readily perceived when crossing the threshold of a home where God's Law is observed. A good mother marvels at the innocence of her little ones, just as they, in turn, discern the first image of the Creator in the matriarch's kindly smile. An upright father, in whom virtues such as purity and honesty shine, will be a source of delight to his children, just as they will bring him joy with their candour and rectitude.

Enthusiasm ascends Calvary

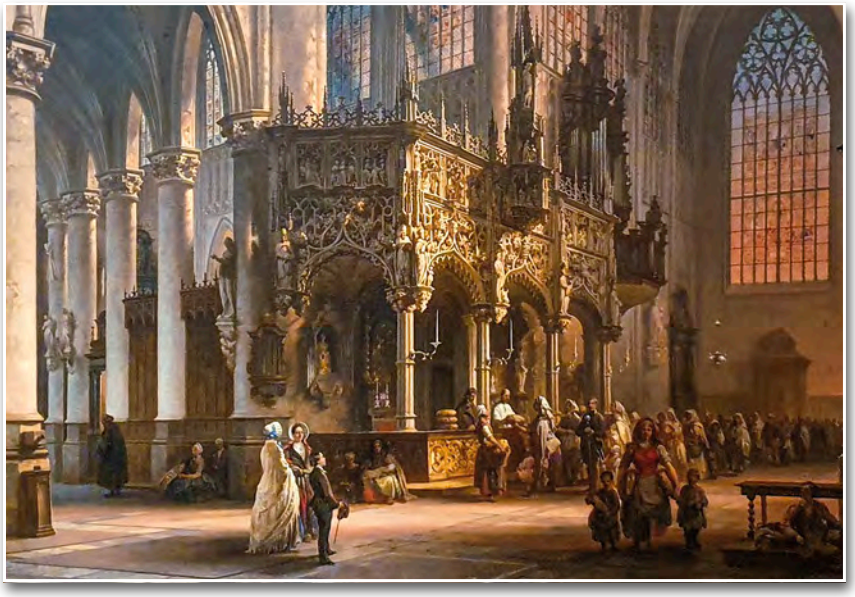
Enthusiasm, veneration, and tenderness naturally unfold into acts of *service* and *obedience*; when carried to their ultimate consequences, these constitute a true *holocaust* of love – the final and most precious fruit of the sacral spirit.

Indeed, sincerity of heart is proven in suffering. The love of one unwilling to sacrifice oneself is a parody, hypocrisy, or perhaps mere sentimentality.

Souls that ascend Calvary for the sake of an ideal spread the flames of their enthusiasm to the rest of the world This explains why the dawn of the Church was stained with the blood of martyrs.

"How was it possible," Dr. Plinio asked, commenting on the martyrdoms of early Christianity, "for a lion to pounce upon a young woman or a young man – tearing those creatures full of life to shreds – and for an onlooker to say, 'I shall do the same'? How could this happen without enthusiasm, veneration, and tenderness?" And he concluded: "The driving force behind the expansion of Christianity was an immense conflagration of sacrality at the very heart of the Roman Empire."[8]

Sacrality is not limited to the realm of social relations, but should influence every aspect of life, as much in the temporal order as in the spiritual



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Thus, the sacralization of earthly realities prepares a springboard for the soul to soar toward God. Music, cuisine, architecture, painting, and clothing become supports for the practice of virtue

The interior of St. Gummarus Church in Lier, by Jules Victor Genisson - Soumaya Museum, Mexico City

The sacred, the profane and sacrality

Sacrality, however, is not limited to the realm of social relations. It must extend its beneficial influence over every aspect of life, whether in the spiritual or the temporal order.

It is easier for us to understand the presence of sacred objects in the religious sphere. Majestic churches, golden chalices, fine linen vestments… although in certain circles these are regarded as superfluous luxuries, such pomp and ceremony are an inseparable part of the Church's practices.

It is more difficult, however, to conceive of these realities permeating everyday life in their own way. How, then, are we to understand the use of the best tableware, beautiful decorative objects, elegant furniture, and, especially, refined manners in the twenty-first century?

Shaped by so many utilitarian views of human life, all of this strikes us as waste, vanity, and affectation. Yet this is far from being the truth.

A platform for the flight of the soul

Dr. Plinio[9] pointed out that the arts and ambiences possess a special quality for vividly influencing mentalities, leading families and entire peoples to adopt certain states of mind – whether good or bad.

If the sensory stimulus of the colour red, as psychological studies attest, can stir up certain passions; if the serene rhythm of ocean waves favours reflection; and if a dirty, neglected street fosters crime, then it is clear that material

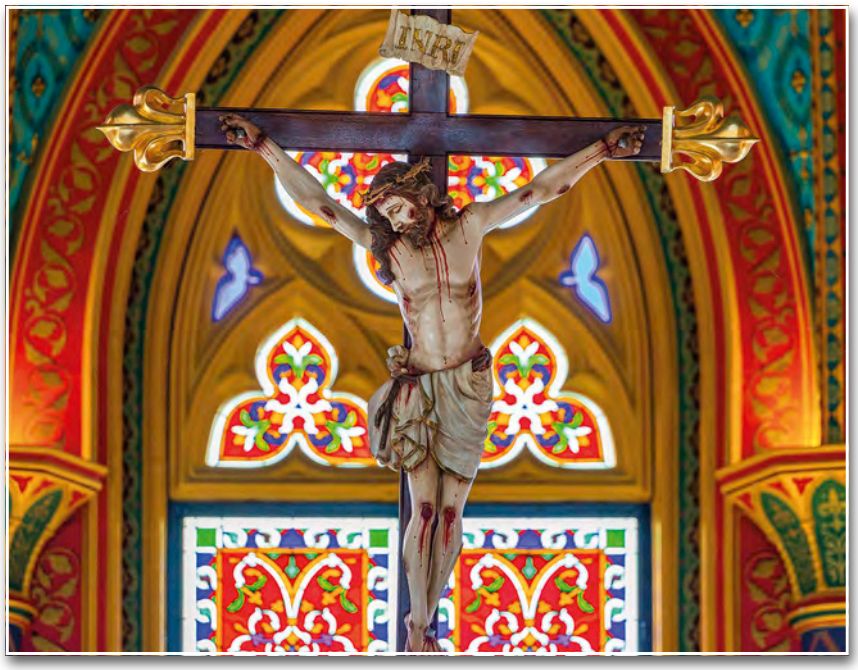
elements can influence the body as well as the soul, inextricably united to it.

Thus, the sacralization of earthly realities prepares a springboard for the soul to soar toward God. Music, cuisine, architecture, painting, and clothing become supports for the practice of virtue. This what it means to preach "the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15) – even the inanimate parts.

In this way, sacrality extends its influence to the most ordinary actions. It is what turns the home into a sanctuary and offers man a standard of conduct, helping him, even in the privacy of his own life, not to forget that he is a child of God.

For what good will it do us to admire a beautiful church while leaving our own home in disorder? And with what disposition would we receive the Son of God in Holy Communion if we were to subsequently scandalize our children with vulgar gestures and words? What use, ultimately, is it to converse reverently with the Lord in prayer, only to speak of base matters when among friends?

To be one and the same before God and men: this is the ideal of sacrality.



Leandro Souza

The Cross, the ultimate fruit of sacrality, is the helm of history which, resting upon our shoulders, will guide us unscathed through the dark sea of our times

Crucifix in Our Lady of Fatima Chapel, Nova Friburgo (Brazil)

Steering the helm of history

And what is the result when someone strives to live in this way? Holiness – for, as Dr. Plinio explains, this "is the state of soul in which a person has infused sacrality into all things,"[10] including – and above all – within himself.

Persons captivated by sacrality and borne by holy enthusiasm to the point of sacrifice are the true driving force of history. What moves it is not mere theory, but orthodoxy that is lived out and, as it were, embodied.

When, however, humanity drifts away from this spirit, crises erupt: individuals withdraw into themselves, social interaction turns into a hollow contest for prestige, ceremony loses its savour and its reason for being, and existence sinks into emptiness.

Souls captivated by sacrality and borne by holy enthusiasm to the point of sacrifice are the true driving force of history

Yet there is a ladder by which to return to the light. Thus did Isaiah prophesy regarding the Messiah:

"For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder" (9:5).

What did Jesus Christ bear "upon His shoulder"?

The Cross – the final fruit of sacrality; the Cross – the helm of history which, resting upon our own shoulders, will guide us unscathed through the dark sea of our times. ✣

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[1] The reflections on sacrality presented in this article were derived, broadly speaking, from a series of lectures given by Dr. Plinio in 1967.

[2] CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. Noção de sacralidade [The Notion of Sacrality]. In: *Dr. Plinio*. São Paulo. Year XVII. No. 200 (Nov., 2014), p.20.

[3] Idem. *Conference*. São Paulo, 5/11/1968.

[4] Ibid.

[5] ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX. "Si j'étais la Reine du Ciel". Prière 21. In: *Œuvres Complètes*. Paris-Bilbao: Cerf; Desclée de Brouwer, 2006, p.976.

[6] Cf. LENOTRE, G. *Gens de la vieille France*. Paris: Perrin, 1919, p.84-85.

[7] Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiæ*. II-II, q.103, a.2.

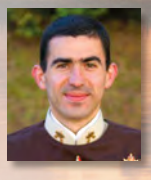
[8] CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Talk*. São Paulo, 15/4/1967.

[9] Cf. idem. *Revolução e Contra-Revolução*. 9.ed. São Paulo: Arautos do Evangelho, 2024, p.119-121.

[10] Idem. *Conference*. São Paulo, 8/4/1967.

Transcending, Towards the Absolute

The sublime vision of things grants us a knowledge grounded in faith, which beholds the perfect as if in a mirror and, guided by the Holy Spirit, becomes capable of penetrating the Absolute.



Santiago Vieto Rodríguez

It is said that Rubens produced over two and a half thousand works[1] – many of enormous proportions – addressing themes as complex as religious and historical subjects. From this, it is deduced that this celebrated artist completed approximately one work per week, for fifty years without interruption. A prodigious feat, without a doubt, considering he lived only sixty-two years…

Yet, however fertile a man's imagination may be, and however many years he lives to capture his impressions with pigments on canvases or panels, the magnitude of his creative output can never compare to that of the Supreme Artist, who surprises us each day with new wonders.

To illustrate this, one need only look out the window upon awakening. The majestic sun rises amidst clouds – now placid, now threatening; festive, pure white or sombre; or sometimes even suggesting mythical creatures – constantly evoking other realities and transforming by the second into unique moments that will never be repeated in history.

The infinitude of the divine work, reflected in a single aspect of creation such as the dawn, holds such richness that before this sublime spectacle, a soul thirsting for virtue can renew its strength each day and nourish the hope of eternity with Him who remains invariably the same, yet always distinct and surprising – inexhaustible and infinite.

Where does the truth lie?

A beautiful vista, however, can be viewed from various perspectives.

A scientist, for instance, referring to the clouds, would describe them as microscopic droplets suspended in the atmosphere, formed by the condensation of H_2O. And we ask ourselves: is that all there is to it?

If, immediately after that definition, someone were to tell an innocent child that God builds magnificent crystal palaces every day for Angels to inhabit – and from which to gaze upon the sun – the little one, enchanted, would surely embrace the latter explanation with greater enthusiasm… Would he be deceived in doing so?

It is true that the scientist possesses more advanced technical knowledge, yet the child – incredible as it may seem – is closer to grasping the truth, which transcends the mere materiality of things in search of their higher causes.

Both contemplated reality, but the child took a sublime view of it.

The art of sublimating

Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira[2] explained that the sublime is a degree of beauty that bears no proportion to man, but rather to God. It is a kind of light that bathes reality, enabling us to discover its highest aspects – particularly those that lead us towards devout contemplation.

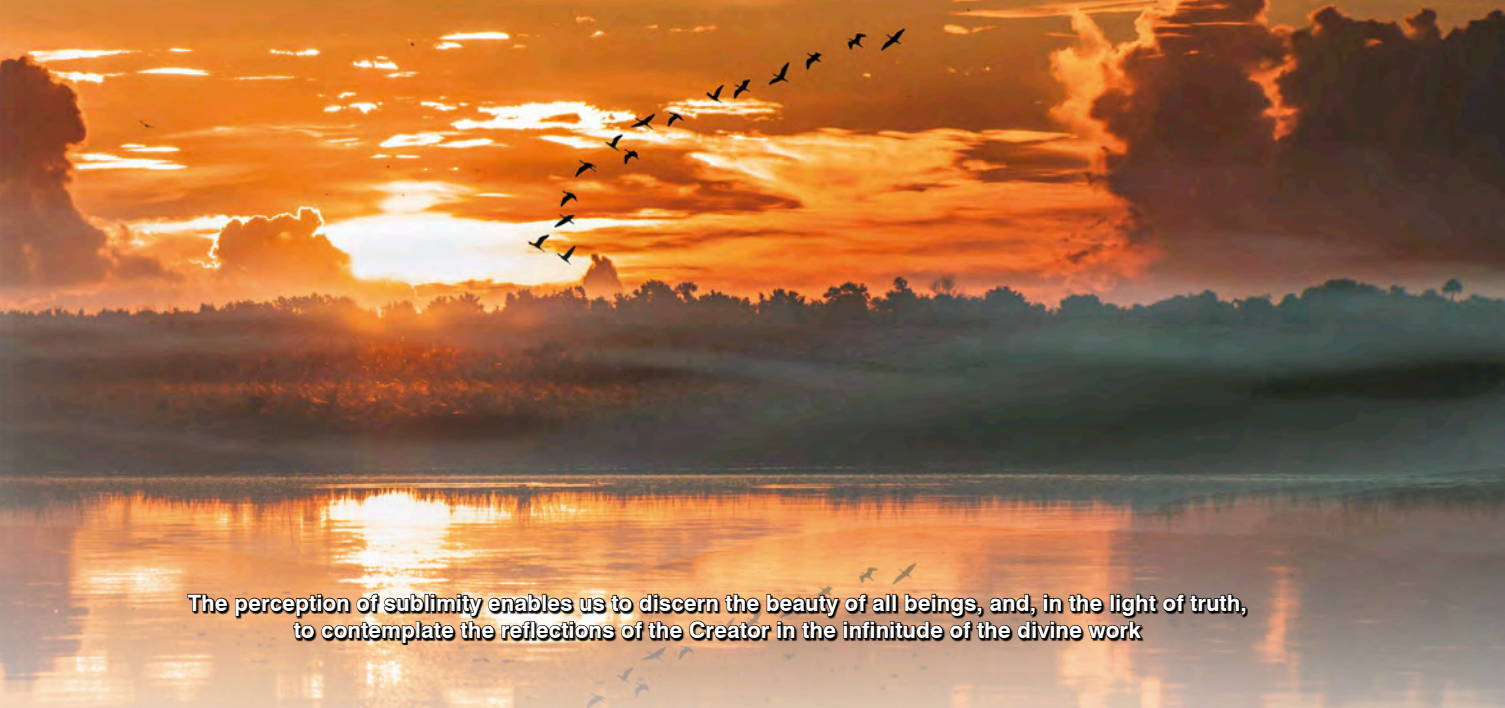
Thus, we can also understand the sublime as "the aspect of persons and things by which they most closely resemble God."[3] Indeed, the perception of sublimity – as a participation in divine wisdom – enables us to discern the beauty of all beings in the light of truth, regarding their original essence and ultimate purpose.

To "sublimate," therefore, is to bring reality into greater conformity with the Creator, lifting it beyond a merely human scale to transcend towards the Absolute.

And since it is the divine design for man to complete the work of creation in the pursuit of perfection – with the aid of grace – the art of sublimating consists, ultimately, in fulfilling the First Commandment. It means engaging in a continuous movement of "theotropism" – a seeking of God – a supreme goal and mission that can only be attained when the temporal unites with the eternal.

One form of knowledge does not exclude the other

In an increasingly positivist world, choosing a sublime mentality – one



The perception of sublimity enables us to discern the beauty of all beings, and, in the light of truth, to contemplate the reflections of the Creator in the infinitude of the divine work

Bradley Dunn / Unsplash

that transcends the pragmatic view of reality – means swimming against the current in an epic battle and a true test of faith. For, in our society, this visualization appears to be "inaccurate."

Human science alone, while offering us seemingly more precise knowledge of created things, leads us to a limited truth and to results that often change over time.

The sublime vision of things, by contrast, grants us knowledge that appears less exact but – grounded in faith – beholds the perfect, albeit in a mirror (cf. 1 Cor 13:12) and, guided by the Holy Spirit, becomes capable of penetrating the Absolute.

It is worth clarifying, however, that one form of knowledge does not exclude the other, for it is only when united that they reach their perfection.

Indeed, we can observe time and again across various branches of human knowledge – including the most modern ones – that the more truly precise our scientific knowledge proves to be, the more powerful become the springboards propelling the anagogical interpretation of reality.

The hope of our world

It is in the rapturous contemplation of creation – through which we rise to the supernatural – that we will find the solution to the crisis threatening to dehumanize humanity, severing it from its origin and abolishing its very purpose by depriving it of the sublime faculty of sublimation.

We have no grounds for justification, for if we perish, it will be for want of wonder, not for any want of wonders.[4] We must relearn how to contemplate not only our material surroundings but also, and especially, the supernatural – which transcends us and to which we must always turn with a spirit of humility, admiration, and loving prayer.

A lack of attraction to the sublime is the clearest sign of the urgent need to seek virtue, for "holiness is the only full form of sublimity, upon which all other forms of sublimity rest."[5]

Are the magnetic allure of screens – captivating our attention with torrents of narcissistic and superfluous information – along with hyper-connectivity, breakneck speeds, and the constant stimuli to which we submit ourselves – in short, our increasingly artificial, egocentric, and less reflective or contemplative *modus vivendi* – responsible for this decline? It is a complex question, one that would require a far more comprehensive study to answer.

What is certain is that every act born of contemplation – and, even more so, one imbued with sacrality and performed out of charity – contributes to building up the city where God and humanity dwell together. This stands in contrast to the "new Tower of Babel,"[6] which prioritizes hedonistic practicality over the splendour of truth – that is, beauty.

Let us, then, ask the Most Holy Virgin, Mother of all sublimities, to help us always rise towards what is most sublime – and therefore to fly towards her, whose throne is set upon the clouds (cf. Sir 24:4).

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[1] Cf. PARRAMÓN VILASALÓ, José Maria. *El gran libro de la pintura al óleo*. 14.ed. Barcelona: Parramón, 2000, p.30.

[2] Cf. CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 11/10/1965.

[3] CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Talk*. São Paulo, 4/6/1988.

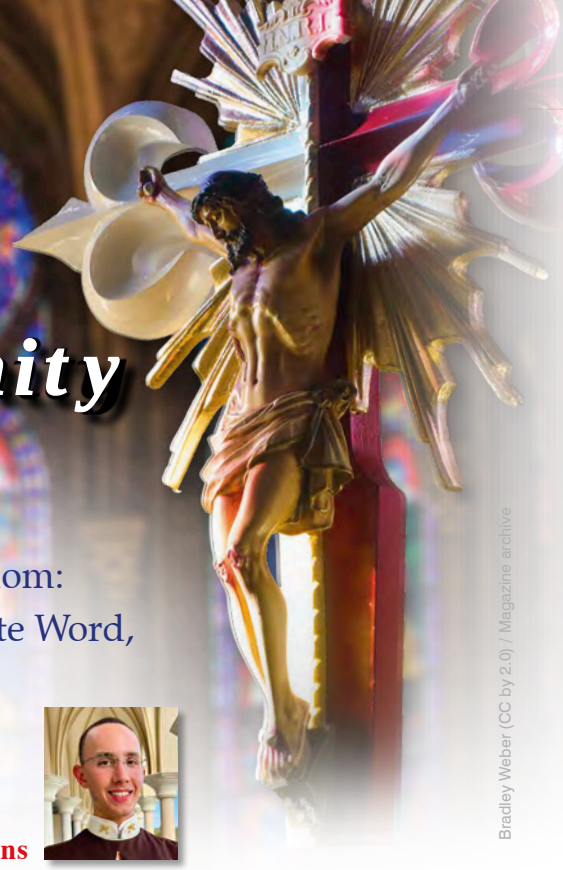
[4] Cf. CHESTERTON, Gilbert Keith. *Tremendous Trifles*. Nordersted: Hansebooks, 2018, p.7.

[5] CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 11/10/1965.

[6] LEO XIV. *Magnifica humanitas*, n.1.



Building for Eternity



Bradley Weber (CC by 2.0) / Magazine archive

Such was the most august meaning of Christendom: to give substance to the teachings of the Incarnate Word, to translate truth into ways of life, and to give visible form to the intangible beauty of the supernatural world.

Pedro Gusson Angelune Martins

Tourists in a medieval cathedral. The scene aptly represents the paradox in which Western man lives. A child of progress, he cannot detach himself from tradition. He would never build a Gothic-style home for himself. He lives in the present and plans for the future, yet he takes his vacations in the past. The cathedral – like so many other ancient monuments – dazzles, captivates, and fascinates him; yet it fails to convince him that it was erected in a real world by real men of flesh and blood – those medieval people who did not merely spend their leisure moments visiting monuments, but lived in them.

Our tourists, however, do not pause for such reflections. They are too pressed for time. They content themselves with a few fleeting photographs – captured on ephemeral smartphones – of that eternal masterpiece. For their days off will soon end, and there they will be, leaving behind this dream of stone to return to a reality of concrete. Until the next vacation, when they already plan to visit other beautiful monuments – ruins of Christendom.

Christendom. The mere sound of the word evokes happy times, an age of light rather than darkness, when "States were governed by the philosophy of the Gospel."[1] Indeed, the spirit of the Catholic Church was once the very lifeblood of civilization. Medieval Christendom blossomed magnificently, standing as one of the finest fruits produced by the Mystical Spouse of Christ.

Today, we live on the memory of it. Its ruins awaken an inexplicable nostalgia that draws thousands of visitors every year.

> *The baptism of nascent Christian Civilization took place in the blood and water flowing from the open side of the Saviour on the Cross*

Above all, the cross reigned

When did Christian Civilization come into being? It would be futile to attempt to establish a precise date. Some might say it emerged when Clovis was born to grace, or with the promulgation of the Edict of Milan, which granted freedom to the Christian faith. In truth, its baptism was that of the blood and water flowing from the open side of the Saviour hanging upon the Cross, and the edict that gave rise to it was the Word of Truth Himself, who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).

Although the Church – and her Divine Founder – already held within herself, like a vigorous shoot, the entirety of that civilization in all its splendour, centuries were required for that flower to bloom and spread its perfume over all the earth. At the dawn of the ninth century, on a cold night that vividly recalled the one when the Eternal Light came into the world, the foundations for the formation of Europe were laid.[2] When Charlemagne – known as *Pater Europæ*[3] – received the crown from the

hands of the Supreme Pontiff, the union between the spiritual and temporal power shone forth as never before. The orb was represented in the emperor's diadem: above all, the cross reigned.

Such was the most august meaning of Christendom: to give substance to the teachings of the Incarnate Word, to translate truth into ways of life, and to give visible form to the intangible beauty of the supernatural world, that gold, silver, crystal, and stone be shaped by the teachings of the Gospel. And so that man, made of clay, upon beholding them, might become ever more God's image.

Using matter to praise the Creator

It would be a mistake to think that the spirit of the Church rests upon pure asceticism or the denial of the material. Although it preaches mortification as a path to virtue, the Church has never condemned matter itself – such a denial belongs to pagan and Gnostic heresies.

Indeed, on the sixth day of creation "God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gn 1:31), and the Church holds that sensory knowledge can offer elements for our benefit. Admiration for the marvels of creation is a gift from the Most High and should be used to glorify Him.

> *The spirit of the Church moulds matter according to Christ's teachings, so as to transform the earth into an antechamber of the Heavenly Palace*

In this sense, Christendom is eminently *realist* – and real comes from the Latin *res*, meaning "thing" – such that, employing techniques that still astonish modern engineering, it erected towers over a hundred metres high. Medieval people did not aim, as contemporaries do, merely to scrape the sky; they sought to transcend the limits of the celestial vault to touch the throne of God.

This realism aimed to turn earth into an antechamber of the Heavenly Palace: not content with merely contemplating sunlight, it devised the stained glass we know today. Walls were transformed into crystal, and light was perceived through the colours of Paradise.

This same realism saw in the sea the perfect pavement for the streets of a fabled city. Thus, Venice was born. And this realism, applied in this way, can be given a specific name: *sacrality*.[4]

Even after the luminous era of the Middle Ages had passed, Christian Civilization – already in decline



Wolfgang Moroder (CC by-sa 3.0) / kallema (CC by-sa 4.0)

Medieval realism envisioned in the sea the perfect pavement for the streets of a fabled city: thus, Venice was born

Views of Venice (Italy). On the previous page: processional crucifix - Private collection; in the background, interior of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris



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Patrick Hendry / Unsplash

from many perspectives – continued to bear fruit beyond all expectation. In its death throes, it revealed splendours hitherto unknown to man, like a dying swan that, at the very limit of its existence, intones its most beautiful song.

Thus, Christendom would go on to produce the Palace of Versailles – with its magnificent halls and galleries, its perfectly symmetrical gardens, and a grandeur of design befitting the reign of a monarch who dared to liken himself to the sun. And what of Neuschwanstein? A fantastical castle set in a landscape as wondrous as the building itself, it stands as enduring proof that the unreal can exist, and captivate.

> *Even after the luminous era of the Middle Ages, Christian Civilization, in decline from many perspectives, continued to bear fruit beyond all expectation*

Can Christendom die?

Today, all of this survives only in inert monuments, uninhabited by the men who gave them life. Such is the current state of what was once Christendom: a body seemingly devoid of soul.

But has Christendom truly died?

The question is as difficult to answer as it is uncertain to define the moment when twilight turns into night. Often, the most beautiful colours appear in the firmament only after the sun has vanished. A moment later, the stars emerge, still shy. Warm hues blend with the deep blue. Soon, the sky is nothing but a black veil where diamond fragments shimmer. The scene holds its own splendour, yet the king of stars is no longer there. Darkness has taken hold…

We are living through the night of Christian Civilization. After centuries of de-Christianization, the customs, influence, and spirit of the Church have faded in the West. Crises of every kind have erupted, leading us into the present gloom.

Yet, following this apparent death, what lies ahead is not eternal night, but the dawn of a more brilliant era.

Christendom will endure through the ages, rising again with greater splendour – like a dawn triumphing over shadows or a rainbow painted against the black clouds of a receding storm – to remind us that in this world, storms do not last forever, but the sun shining above them does. ✣

Christendom will rise again with greater splendour, like a triumphant dawn, to remind us that in this world, storms do not last forever

From top to bottom: Neuschwanstein Castle (Germany); Palace of Versailles and its Gallery of Mirrors (France)

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[1] LEO XIII. *Immortale Dei*, n. 21.

[2] Cf. ST. JOHN PAUL II. *Speech*, 24/3/2004.

[3] From the Latin: Father of Europe.

[4] See the article *The Helm of History*, in this issue.



The Vocation of Sacred Art

Catechism of the Catholic Church

§§2502-2503 Sacred art is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God – the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love visible in Christ [...]. For this reason bishops, personally or through delegates, should see to the promotion of sacred art, old and new, in all its forms and, with the same religious care, remove from the Liturgy and from places of worship everything which is not in conformity with the truth of faith and the authentic beauty of sacred art.

In defining the essence and purpose of sacred art, the *Catechism* highlights its sublime mission to manifest the mysteries of God. It cannot, therefore, be conceived from a utilitarian or pragmatic perspective, or made subservient to the artistic trends, styles, and fleeting fashions of modernity. On the contrary, when true sacred art springs from faith and is shaped by human talent under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it becomes a luminous path leading the faithful to Supreme Beauty.

This path is called the *via pulchritudinis* – a theological concept frequently cited by Benedict XVI[1] – which proposes the path of beauty (specifically through sacred art and the Liturgy) as a privileged way to open the human mind to the contemplation of God.

Indeed, when sacred art is imbued with the captivating power of beauty, it can deeply move any individual, thereby transcending the traditional routes of theoretical reflection in the quest to reach God. The Most High makes Himself accessible to human senses through paintings and frescoes, images and sculptures, stained glass and mosaics, and sacred instruments and chants. Churches, by bringing these elements together, become like reliquaries whose splendour invites the faithful to solemn liturgical celebrations.

In light of these reflections, the requirement set forth in paragraph 2503 – quoted above – is better understood; it mandates that bishops "remove from the Liturgy and from places of worship everything which is not in conformity with the truth of faith and the authentic beauty of sacred art."

This provision encapsulates the teaching of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which is even more emphatic: prelates must "carefully remove from the house of God and from other sacred places those works of artists which are repugnant to faith, morals, and Christian piety, and which offend true religious sense either by depraved forms or by lack of artistic worth, mediocrity and pretense."[2]

In short, when sacred art departs from its essential sacredness – abandoning the mission of reflecting the infinite beauty that is God – it loses its very identity, becoming profane and banal.

In a world whose paths are straying from the *via pulchritudinis*, the duty of pastors to preserve genuine sacred art – free from styles divorced from the true religious sense, as the Second Vatican Council aptly decreed – is now more urgent than ever. ✣



António Carneiro

Called to reflect God and manifest His mysteries, when sacred art departs from its essential sacredness, it loses its very identity, becoming profane and banal.

"The White Virgin" - Cathedral of Toledo (Spain)

[1] See, for example: BENEDICT XVI. *Speech*, 21/11/2009.

[2] SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n.124.



Useful and Necessary Beauty

When analysing various structures built in the past, Dr. Plinio marvelled at finding in them – almost as a common architectural trait – beauty combined with practicality, featuring proportions that respect the human being and help to elevate the soul to God.

Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira

The Middle Ages was an era in which, under the inspiration of the Church, full functionality and perfect beauty were absolutely united. This is not a claim of mine – as a counter-revolutionary – but rather one found in all architectural books dedicated to medieval Gothic art, which was functional in its every detail.

A column transformed into a work of art

Let us consider, for instance, the portal of Amiens Cathedral. At the centre of that magnificent doorway stands a column – essential for supporting both the portal and the building itself; and yet it has been transformed into a work of art. It obstructs the view of the cathedral's interior at first glance, thereby offering a delightful surprise to those who enter.

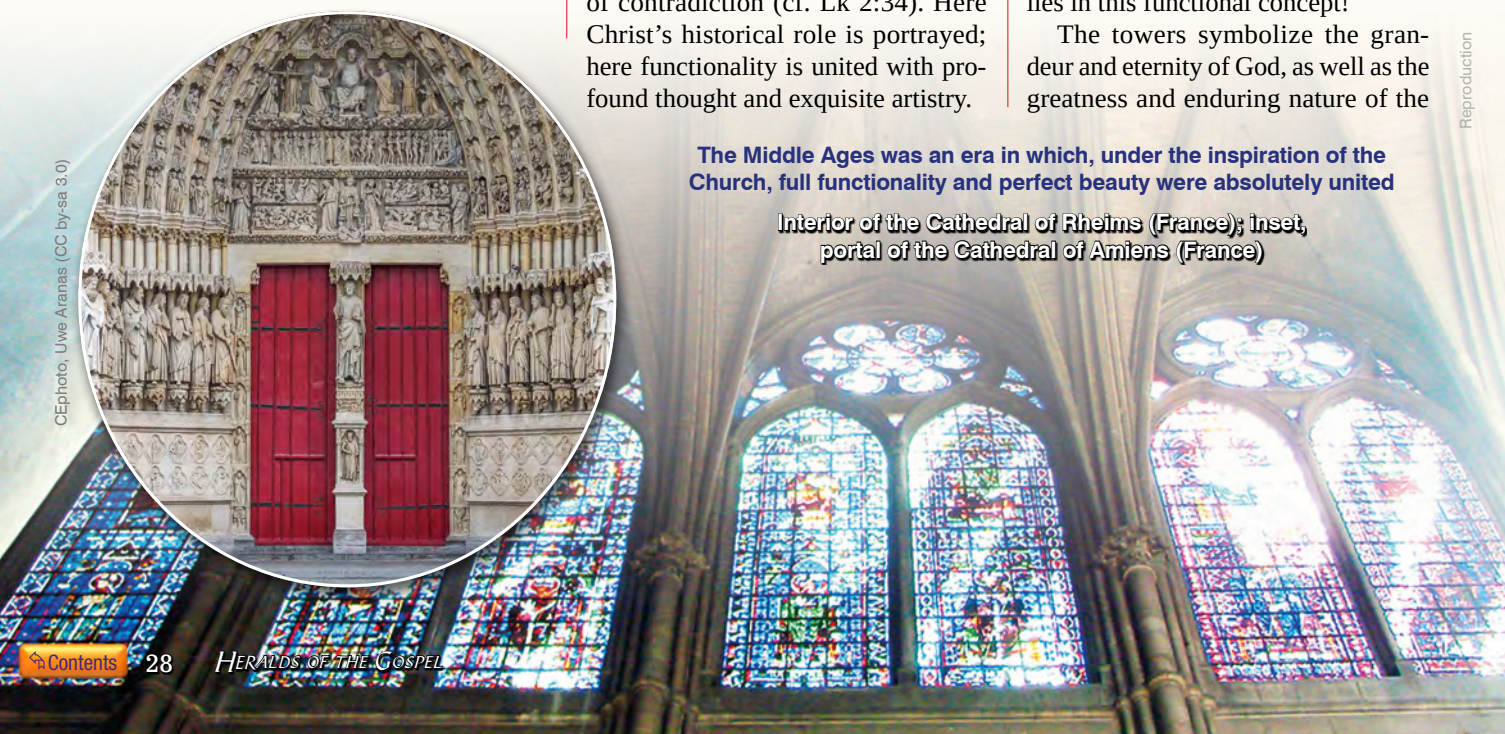
On the upper half of the column, the figure of Our Lord Jesus Christ is displayed – a customary depiction at cathedral entrances – signifying that He is the divider of human destiny: separating those bound for salvation from those bound for perdition. He is set for the fall and the rising of many, as the prophet Simeon foretold, as a sign of contradiction (cf. Lk 2:34). Here Christ's historical role is portrayed; here functionality is united with profound thought and exquisite artistry.

The magnificent Rheims Cathedral

Let us consider the façade of Rheims Cathedral, where the kings of France were crowned before the French Revolution. How magnificent it is! It possesses such a wealth of architecture and art that I dare not even attempt to describe it.

What, for instance, is the reason for such deep porticoes? They were designed so that the poor and the homeless – who had nowhere else to turn during a storm – could find shelter beneath the church's maternal portals, especially in an era when commercial buildings were smaller. What artistry lies in this functional concept!

The towers symbolize the grandeur and eternity of God, as well as the greatness and enduring nature of the



The Middle Ages was an era in which, under the inspiration of the Church, full functionality and perfect beauty were absolutely united

Interior of the Cathedral of Rheims (France); inset, portal of the Cathedral of Amiens (France)

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Holy Catholic Church. Yet, their towering height and grandeur also serve a practical purpose: they house the bells that must be heard throughout the city and the surrounding areas.

A cathedral cannot remain in darkness. Thus, magnificent rose windows were constructed. Light enters harmoniously through the stained glass – not too much, but in just enough, for an atmosphere of spiritual recollection calls for subdued lighting. The illumination is proportionate to the building's size; the dimensions of the stained-glass windows were calculated based on the desired level of light within the interior. What beautiful light – balanced and harmonious!

And why the magnificent colours that turn these stained-glass windows into true jewels? Primarily because the church is a sacred edifice and, as such, must convey lessons from Sacred History and the Faith. To this end, the windows feature a multitude of figures illustrating points of Catholic doctrine and Church history. It is often said that stained-glass windows served as the Bible for the illiterate.

One might object: "So there were illiterate people in the Middle Ages!…" I reply: "Yes, but what Bibles they had! What a way to learn to read! What a contrast to the little primers used in modern schools… What opulence!" Indeed, it must be said: compared to all previous eras, the Middle Ages was the period when the greatest effort was made to bring literacy to the common man. So much so that the printing press emerged just as the medieval era came to a close. How could the press have been of such great importance if no one knew how to read or write?

The cathedral was the palace of the poor. Sumptuous though it was, the humblest person could enter and feel just as at home as a king, a potentate, or a wealthy magnate. They were treasure troves of art, made accessible to God's people. With what artistry were figures from history and Christendom – kings and prophets of the Old Testament – portrayed!



Andrew Parlette (CC by 4.0)

Art is essential for the balance of the human soul and for reaching God

Cathedral of Orvieto (Italy)

Yet all of this played a role – beyond sheltering people from wind, rain, and snow, and directing the light – namely, to instruct and delight the soul. Stained-glass windows thus represent a perfect union between exquisite tas0te and strict functionality.

The building required many columns, given the construction methods of the time. Yet how graceful, delicate and artistic they are in comparison with those immense modern columns, which seem to have been built at the very moment of a crime, as if to crush a man beneath them, sometimes giving the impression that they lead straight to hell. Medieval columns do not crush: the spirit soars up along them, for they lead to Heaven!

Orvieto Cathedral: a symphony of colours

Another example is the magnificent Orvieto Cathedral in Italy. What makes its exterior unique among medieval cathedrals is that it features paintings rather than sculptures – and what paintings they are! Splendid mosaics, resistant to the ravages of light and time, transform the cathedral into a symphony of colours.

What is the reason for this decoration? Undoubtedly, art. And here we arrive at a profound conclusion: art is essential for the balance of the human soul and for reaching God. Thus, as a manifestation of beauty, it serves a vital function.

Yet there is another advantage: beyond offering instruction to passersby, the mosaics provide excellent protection against the elements, as they are remarkably durable and perfectly preserved. The entire cathedral appears as though it were built yesterday, even though it has withstood the centuries. It does not bear the magnificent, venerable age of ancient granite cathedrals, but rather a durability that speaks of the eternal – a quality unique to Orvieto Cathedral.

What painting boasts such fresh colours, representing such splendour and such superlative vitality of the soul? Everything about this structure points toward Heaven.



"What respect for the human being is evident in a structure like this! Man feels fully cared for, protected, defended, and guided towards God!"

The graceful and majestic Tower of Belém

The Belém Tower in Portugal – built of a material so white that on a moonlit night, as I saw it, it seems made of moonlight itself – is so beautiful one might suppose it was conceived by an extravagant artist in a poetic setting. But in reality, it stands at the mouth of the Tagus River, facing the ocean, at a vantage point essential for spotting approaching enemies. Its watchtowers were needed to shelter soldiers, and its battlements were indispensable for their defence. Cannon ports are found in its lower section – everything calculated for a strictly functional maritime fortification.

From one perspective, the tower – so graceful with its battlements and turrets – looks like a toy; yet, being so majestic and strong, it conveys the impression of a true fortress. Indeed, it was such an effective fortification that, for the standards of the time, it struck fear into any soul so daring as to wish to enter the Tagus.

There is also another reason: when Portuguese fleets set sail to the Indies – the populace, and even the monarchs, would go to bid the crews farewell. Officials would stand on the upper terrace alongside the king and his court as Portugal's flags and standards fluttered in the wind; it was a moment of grand farewell and separation for those embarking on adventure, on apostolic missions, and on a quest for the grandeur of Christendom and the Portuguese nation.

Picture a lavish display of banners and tapestries there; the king, the queen, and their court bidding farewell to ships setting sail to discover new lands – bearing the Cross of Christ on their masts – and to bring new peoples into the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church. It is a magnificent sight! So beautiful, in fact, that it seems to have been built solely for this epic scene. Here, beauty and practicality go hand in hand: a stupendous lookout that is, undeniably, also highly functional. What profound respect for the human being is evident in a structure like this! Man feels fully cared for, protected, defended, and guided toward God!

Something similar applies to certain fortified bridges. Compare them to these modern "flat bridges"… they are merely blocks placed over an abyss, by means of a terrifying technique, with cars driving over them.

One might ask: "Why adorn a bridge with towers? They are certainly beautiful, and they make a pleasing reflection in the water, but what purpose do they serve?" They serve this purpose: each tower on the bridge was a fortification. If the enemy managed to break through at one point, they would still have to fight three separate battles before entering the city. It is a blend of art, good taste, and utility.

Where the soul is, beauty must be

The Château de La Rochepot possesses a truly lovely feature: the beautiful colouring of its roof – cheerful, festive, and designed to be seen from afar, as if announcing the beauty of the structure itself.

The shape of the roof reveals a concern for preventing snow accumulation; it is functionality expressed through art. The good sense of past centuries demonstrated the necessity of art's presence, for wherever man is found, the soul is present above all – and where the soul is, beauty must be.

Another magnificent roof is that of the Hôtel-Dieu hospital in France. It reflects the concern of our forbearers to infuse art into everything, without sacrificing practicality. It is supremely functional, taking into account man's spiritual nature and religious purpose.



From left to right: Belém Tower- Lisbon; Castle of La Rochepot (France); Cathedral of Rouen (France). Inset, Dr. Plinio in 1990

Mário Shinoda

To show that creating such structures is not the exclusive privilege of the medieval soul – requiring only the will to build them and the backing of a strong Catholic tradition – let us consider one of the castles of King Ludwig II of Bavaria. Built in the last century,[1] the edifice possesses a medieval character and beauty. How superb it is! The rocky precipices – what grandeur they display! It represents a revival of the Middle Ages, one might say, almost in our own times.

Peace, seriousness and happiness

Let us consider Rouen, the city where St. Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. The small bourgeois houses seen there convey a sense of intimacy. One has the feeling that their inhabitants live in a state of profound quietude and calm. At times, there are small projections on the buildings; perhaps a father had an extra room built when a child was born into the family. The result is so picturesque and interesting that it lends the house its charm and grace.

Rising amidst these small houses is the tower of Rouen Cathedral, soaring upward in a mighty surge toward the heavens. How it mirrors the immense majesty of divine realities! The tower stands above the commercial town just as Religion stands above all earthly things. One might say the tower grows slenderer as it ascends, almost transforming into the sky itself; it is hard to tell whether its pinnacle is more air than earth, or more light than stone. It seems to inspire a desire to ascend, inviting the soul to rise!

In the preface to the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Charles Montalembert recounts how a Muslim man, taken prisoner by the Crusaders, was granted permission to travel across Europe; upon seeing the cathedrals, he asked who built them. He was then shown a lay brother from a monastery:

"He is one of the men who build these monuments."

Surprised, he asked:

"How can such humble men build such towering edifices?"

Such is the Catholic soul: humble regarding itself, yet insatiable in giving glory to God. In Rouen Cathedral, the glory of God is sung by a spire that rises higher than any other earthly building. This is the Catholic Church towering over temporal society; it stands above all else.

The River Seine flows through the city, its banks lined with stone; the streets – far from being highways – allowed one to walk in tranquillity, conversing, praying, pausing, and reflecting. It was a life made for thought, for recollection, and for work that does not crush the spirit – a life befitting the children of God.

Does not daily life in a small medieval town seem far more pleasant than in vast modern developments? The proportions were human; nothing was overwhelming, and there was no chaos or confusing labyrinths. On the contrary, there was peace, solemnity, orderly work, and a calm demeanour; above all, there was contemplation, piety and happiness. ✣

Taken, with adaptations, from: *Dr. Plinio*. São Paulo. Year XXIV. No. 285 (Dec., 2021), p.28-35; Year XXVI. No. 304 (July, 2023), p.32-35

[1] Neuschwanstein Castle, built in the second half of the 19th century.

Poetry in Painting

Just as sunlight breathes life into all things, Claude Lorrain knew how to imbue earthly reality with a celestial quality, and his paintings lift our spirits toward Heaven.



Sr. Priscilla Stephanie Cerqueira

Throughout history, man has sought in many ways to represent the nature of his surroundings through art, transcending mere reality and enriching it – whether through splendour, proportion, or colour – with something of his own perception and desire for the marvellous.

This tendency to elevate earthly realities took on different nuances after man lost, through sin, the Paradise of delights and incomparable beauty he had received from God – a place for which he harbours a deep longing.

In this land of suffering, he feels like a dethroned king, a prince exiled from his true homeland, and in this painful situation, he will either seek to recuperate something of Eden's sublimity or mar and destroy what remains to him, surrendering to disordered passions and degrading himself in an act of rebellion akin to that of Lucifer.

In seeking the paradisiacal aspects of things, the human soul ultimately searches for divine perfection – albeit gropingly – and in this act of praise, it fulfils the purpose for which it was created. Moreover, through art, we poor exiles possess an assurance that the Lord is and will remain with us until the end of time (cf. Mt 28:20) and that, after this life, we may attain perfect happiness in the Kingdom of Heaven: the Paradise of God's children – incomparably superior to the Earthly Paradise.



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In seeking the paradisiacal aspects of things, the human soul ultimately searches for divine perfection

Self-portrait of artist Claude Lorrain; above, "Rural landscape" - Art Institute of Minneapolis (Minnesota)

For these and other reasons, the Holy Church has throughout the ages been the teacher, promoter, and guardian of all that is marvellous in the world; under her care, the most diverse artistic expressions have flourished to a superlative degree.

Let us, then, with a spirit of prayer, admire in these pages the works of the painter Claude Gellée – better known as Claude Lorrain – a luminous example (in the full sense of the word, as will be seen) of man's attempt to elevate earthly realities.

The painter of the sun

Among the countless artists of the 17th century – some of whom remain anonymous – Claude Lorrain stands out for the beauty and meticulous craftsmanship of his works. Hailing from Lorraine in eastern France, he – like so many others – advanced his artistic skills by apprenticing with renowned masters of Italian painting.

After settling in Rome, he drew inspiration from the trends flourishing at the time – tendancies that were, unfortunately, almost universally characterized by moral laxity. Nevertheless, within his own studio, Claude be-





Photos: Reproduction

"His style is diaphanous and enchanting, revealing a unique ability to reproduce on canvas that element without which things would be nothing more than what they are: sunlight. Lorrain is the painter of the sun"

At left, "Seascape with Ezekiel Crying on the Ruins of Tyre" - Private collection; at right, "The Embarkation of St. Paula" - Prado Museum, Madrid

queathed to posterity a kaleidoscope of concepts regarding nature and, above all, an admirable and unique depiction of the effects of sunlight on landscapes, buildings, ruins, and figures.

Commenting on his works, Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira observes: "His style is diaphanous and enchanting, revealing a unique ability to reproduce on canvas that element without which – in the words of a French poet – things would be nothing more than what they are: sunlight. Lorrain is the painter of the sun."[1]

On another occasion, he noted: "The best of Lorrain lies in the fact that he paints everything in a land envisioned as an earthly paradise. In other words, the light emanating from his palette lends a paradisiacal quality to the world and to earthly life; from this perspective, it awakens in man a certain longing for an order of things that transcends the tangible, temporal reality we encounter every day. Indeed, just as Fra Angelico knew how to imbue the faces of his figures with a sense of the supernatural, so too did Claude Lorrain convey something celestial in his works."[2]

Life in its ideal splendour

Indeed, the way this painter pours warm sunlight – in countless hues – over every detail his imagination has placed upon the canvas is remarkable.

This is evident, for instance, in *The Embarkation of St. Paula*. Gilded mansions bathed in the rays of the setting sun, ships ready to weigh anchor as soon as all are aboard, the gentle, slender figure of the Saint with her entourage, and the liveliness of devotees imploring her for a favour or alms… Everything converges into a profound and serene contemplation of life and what it would be like in its ideal splendour.

With true creative genius – like a brilliant musician capable of composing the various melodies of a symphony through counterpoint, progression, and modulation – Lorrain's paintings exude a harmonious blend of figures and motifs, comparable to the verses of a poem.

"Claude Gellée painted the serene beauty of the Latin countryside and the play of light upon harbour waters. In such carefully ordered compositions […], he managed, through simple colour gradations, to evoke the poetry of nature and the infinity of space. Claude Gellée was a man of intuition and a poet."[3]

Gravity, exuberance, and peace

Some of his works convey a certain melancholy. In *Seascape with Ezekiel Crying on the Ruins of Tyre*, for instance, we see the glow of twilight – in vivid gold – casting a shaft of light across the sombre, dark turquoise sea;





Photos: Reproduction

In rural scenes, one observes both the vibrancy of nature and the tranquillity of the different elements that compose it

Top, "Landscape with the Voyage of Jacob" - Clark Art Institute, Williamstown (Massachusetts); bottom, "Pastoral Landscape" - Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth (Texas)

this highlights the poignant scene of the prophet lamenting the ruins of a cursed city, upon which the sun sheds its rays like a swan song.

In rural scenes, such as *Landscape with the Voyage of Jacob* or *Pastoral Landscape*, one observes the lively, bounding energy of the goats and oxen led by Jacob, alongside the serene grazing of sheep tended by expressive, solemn shepherds. In the latter painting, the animals' tranquillity stems from the simple presence of their keepers, who provide the assurance that no harm will befall them while under their watchful gaze. It is the perfect representation of the verse: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" (Ps 23:1).

May the Holy Spirit inspire new talents!

There is something that encapsulates the almost exclusive allure of Claude Lorrain's landscapes – a mythical, surreal, and wondrous quality, as Dr. Plinio describes: his works "envelop one in a certain degree of 'dream.' For all those historical reminiscences hinted at a dream more beautiful than the scenes themselves. And that is the very essence of art. It was necessary, therefore, to know how to dream a little about all this in order to penetrate to the heart of reality. A dream is not necessarily an escape from reality; rather, depending on the case, it is a way of delving more deeply into it. […] In this regard, the element of the dream was brilliantly illustrated by Claude Lorrain."[4]

For these "dreams" on canvas – the works of the French painter, which are among the thousands of fruits of the Creator's inexhaustible love for humanity – let us give thanks to the Holy Spirit through the intercession of Our Lady, and ask Him to inspire new talents who will enrich the panoply of the fine arts: reflections and mirrors of the Infinite God! ✣

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[1] CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. Feerias de sol, belezas de Deus [Marvels of the Sun, God's Wonders]. In: *Dr. Plinio*. São Paulo. Year III. No. 22 (Jan., 2000), p.32.

[2] Idem. Percepção do sobrenatural [The Perception of the Supernatural]. In: *Dr. Plinio*. São Paulo. Year X. No. 116 (Nov., 2007), p.33.

[3] DUBY, Georges (Dir.). *Histoire de la France. Dynasties et révolutions: de 1348 à 1852*. Paris: Larousse, 1971, v.II, p.165.

[4] CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Talk*. São Paulo, 15/4/1983.



God Is "Pulchrifying"



Fr. Eduardo Miguel Caballero Baza, EP

It is one thing to speak the truth; it is another to proclaim it with eloquence. It is one thing to perform a good deed; it is another to carry it out with dedication. In such cases, elegance and dedication constitute distinctive marks of the beautiful – *pulchrum* – for when truth and goodness unite with a certain splendour, beauty shines forth.

It is no coincidence that the Thomistic tradition enshrined the expression: the beautiful is the splendour of the good and the splendour of the true – *splendor boni, splendor veri*. Indeed, the true, the good, and the beautiful are intimately related. The good is beautiful and true, and leads to the Supreme Good; the true is good and beautiful, and leads to the Supreme Truth; the beautiful is true and good, and leads to Supreme Beauty. Goodness, Truth, Beauty: God, Being by essence, from whom flow – by participation – all goodness, all truth, and all beauty.

But what makes the true, the good, and the beautiful so special? They are "modes of being" (*De veritate*, q.1, a.1), or transcendentals of being. And what does this mean? According to perennial Philosophy, a *transcendental* is a fundamental property of being that accompanies it by the mere fact of its *existence*. It belongs, therefore, to all beings – angels, humans, animals, etc. – and not merely to a particular category among them. Aristotle was the first to address these notions; they were later articulated by Philip the Chancellor (c. 1160–1236) and elevated to new heights by St. Thomas Aquinas.

Building upon the postulates of Aristotle the Stagirite, the Angelic Doctor's profound metaphysics gave these properties of being a unique formulation. With this, it became clearer that the One, the True, and the Good are, first and foremost, attributes of the Being subsisting in itself – God – the measure of all that possesses unity, truth, and goodness by participation in Him (cf. *De veritate*, q.1, a.1; q.21, a.1; 3; *De potentia Dei*, q.7, a.2, ad 9; q.9, a.7, ad 6).



Francisco Lecaros

God is the measure of all that possesses unity, truth, and goodness by participation in Him, and the Cause of beauty in all things

God the Father - Basilica of St. Joan of Arc, Domrémy-la-Pucelle (France)

Aquinas does not explicitly include *pulchrum* among the transcendentals of being. Nor did he leave us a specific treatise on beauty, nor did he devote the same attention to this theme as he did to the true and the good.

Nevertheless, based on scattered passages in his work, it is possible to reconstruct a genuine theory of beauty, through which one can affirm that the *pulchrum* is a transcendental property of being, distinct from the others.

St. Thomas states that those things are beautiful which please when seen (cf. *Summa Theologiæ* I, q.5, a.4, ad 1). According to some, he shows a certain tendency to regard beauty as a physical property: the splendour of form that affects the senses (cf. ibid., I-II, q.27, a.1, ad 3). This interpretation, however, is insufficient, for the Angelic Doctor explicitly affirms the existence of a spiritual beauty, in which a person's conduct and actions are well balanced by the spiritual splendour of reason (cf. ibid., II-II, q.145, a.2).

Thus, God can be called "pulchrifying" – *that which produces beauty* – because He is the cause of beauty in all things, imparting light and splendour to them (cf. *Super De divinis nominibus*, c. IV, lect. 5, n.340). Indeed, all beauty that may exist in creatures is a participation in Absolute Beauty (cf. ibid., n.346).

St. Saturnin of Toulouse – November 29

Who Will Be Remembered?



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The memory of some fills the pages of the past; that of others traces the lines of the future. The memory of the former stands like a statue; that of the latter lives on through the centuries…



Giovanni Nazareno Clini de Figueiredo

Rome, matriarch of a great historical era. At the mere mention of her name, a sense of inescapable dominion fills the imagination. Her heroes are stony, imposing and invincible; her men are strong, haughty and proud. In her, legend merges with history; or rather, her history is legendary!

Almost the entire known ancient world was subject to the city of the seven hills. Her emperors, as they surveyed the panorama from the heights of their magnificent palaces, could be certain that the world would soon bow before them… Indeed, the day would come when their dominion would know no setting sun.

One Man, however, subdued – not by force of arms, but solely through the influence of His personality – that indomitable lady; by transforming the despot of Antiquity into the queen of the future, He endowed her with her true identity. This victor was Jesus, whom we recognise as Christ!

As the third century of the Christian era began, much of the empire was already beginning to be illuminated by the radiance of the Holy Cross. In Roman Gaul, a certain herald proclaimed these first glimmers, so that the empire might never witness the setting of the true Sun.

Cultivation begins in Toulouse

In the fourth century B.C., Toulouse fell under Celtic rule and began to appear in historical records.[1] Later, in 128 B.C., Rome established its sovereignty over this region of the yet-barbaric Gaul as well. Despite – or perhaps thanks to – its conquerors, the ancient Gallic city grew increasingly magnificent! Imperial progress built civilization wherever it spread: superb structures and endless roads that still astound modern engineers, and an impeccable legal code that continues to inspire us today. Yet, one thing was missing… or rather, not one *thing*, but *one God*.

This sole God did not abandon humanity to its fate, especially not after sending His Son to redeem it. He ordained the spread of the Good News, commanding: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). In the territory of Toulouse, the first to fulfil this mission would be Saturninus.

Saturninus enters history like a new Melchizedek, of whom Scripture records only that he was "without father or mother or genealogy" (Heb 7:3). His name – a diminutive of Saturn, one of the many gods of pagan Rome – was common and unremarkable for the era, offering no significant clues about the man himself. Furthermore, it is uncertain whether he came from within the Empire or from the East; legends support both theories, and the accounts containing more precise details of his life date from after his arrival in Toulouse, that is, from the time he was already serving as its Bishop.

The story of St. Saturninus became the subject of countless myths, and the official chronicles do little to enrich the story, given that the Roman Martyrology recounts his life in the briefest of terms. We know for certain only that he was the first prelate of Toulouse, where he left behind the memory of an exemplary shepherd.

Upon arriving in those lands, he found the number of the faithful to be small; yet, the words of the Word of God, delivered with heavenly eloquence, found fertile soil in the hearts of the people, quickly yielding "a hundredfold" (Lk 8:8).

Stones, thorns and weeds…

Saturninus was tireless! With true apostolic zeal, he cared not only for the sheep of his own small flock but was also solicitous towards the other members of the Mystical Body of Christ. The saintly Bishop frequently crossed the Pyrenees to evangelize the Iberian

territory. It is said that in Pamplona he baptized – the reader may well be astonished – forty thousand people!

Upon returning to Toulouse, he encountered two ladies, daughters of the King of Huesca and, discerning a special calling in them, exhorted them to have faith in Christ. Converted, both followed him to his diocese. In time, these young women – remembered by the Church as *Holy Maidens* – would courageously strive to recover their Bishop's mortal remains following his martyrdom.

With so many souls saved, one can imagine the rejoicing of the Angels of the nations privileged by the presence of this distinguished shepherd. Yet, one can also glimpse the hatred of hell at seeing its power wane… Thus, despite the triumphs of the Cross, the souls of the leading figures of the age were becoming increasingly like stony ground, filled with thorns and cultivated by the devil (cf. Lk 8:12-14). It was not long before the fruits of such wretched soil became apparent.

In the year 250, the greatest persecution of the Church ever recorded in Gaul broke out. Under the rule of Emperor Decius, edicts were issued compelling Christians, under penalty of death, to bow publicly to idolatry and offer worship to pagan deities.

What was the reason? The silence… not that of the Christians, but of the gods – a silence that had to be broken.

Indeed, time was passing, and although pagan priests implored their idols for wonders, signs, and oracles to guide them, the answer remained the same: a heavy silence. There could be only one explanation for such muteness, for in recent years someone had thrown Gaul into turmoil: that unknown man whose teachings drew crowds. Saturninus was the one to blame!

Armed with this argument, the civil and religious authorities of Toulouse joined forces to enforce the imperial edict; they sought to stifle the seeds of faith newly sown in French soil by demanding the life of the sower.

Incense or blood?

One day, pagan priests spotted Bishop Saturninus walking near the temple of Jupiter. Having incited the crowd, they sought to force him to offer public sacrifice to the gods.

The Saint boldly resisted this vile proposal: "I worship one God alone, and to Him alone will I offer sacrifices of praise. Your gods are evil and delight more in the sacrifice of your souls than in that of your bulls. How could I fear them, when you yourselves acknowledge that they tremble before a Christian?" Such was his spirited defiance that the mob – deeming the tacit approval of the Roman magistrates sufficient – bypassed the usual judicial proceedings and seized the defiant Bishop.

They bound him to a bull destined for sacrifice and drove the animal to a wild, uncontrollable charge through the streets, tearing him to pieces. Unwittingly, however, the mob's uprising watered the very fields the Bishop had sown with this holocaust; his martyrdom would cause the Faith to spring up in that region, eventually bearing abundant fruit.

The memory of the just is eternal!

Pagan Rome may well be remembered for its past; the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church, on the other hand, will never be forgotten, for hers is a triumphant future. The ancient empire tried to substantiate its prestige through heroes carved in stone; the ever-reigning Bride of Christ has immortalized her glory through saints and martyrs.

Saturninus, through the integrity of his life, sustained right up to a most cruel death, earned his place in the roll of the Holy Church, and alongside this illustrious Mother he has held sway for centuries over the hearts of those who had never imagined they would be subject to anyone.

Thus, he who was small in name became great through his example, which will be followed for all time to come. ✣

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[1] The historical and biographical information contained in this article were taken from: DUMAS, Antoine. San Saturnino de Tolosa. In: ECHEVERRÍA, Lamberto; LLORCA, SJ, Bernardino; REPETTO BETES, José Luis (Org.). *Año cristiano*. Madrid: BAC, 2006, v.XI, p.692-697; BUTLER, Alban. *Vidas de los Santos*. México, D.F.: John W. Clute, 1965, v.IV, p.441-442.



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Watering with his own blood the soil on which he had sown the seeds of Christianity, St. Saturninus caused the Faith to spring up in Toulouse

Martyrdom of St. Saturninus - Missal of Jean de Foix - National Library of France, Paris; on the previous page, St. Saturninus, in the church dedicated to him in Marcilly-sur-Maulne (France)

She Is Always by Our Side!

Although appearances may sometimes suggest otherwise, for the sake of a higher good, Dona Lucilia always answers – often in inexplicable ways – the ceaseless petitions of those who turn to her.



Elizabete Fátima Astorino

The French often remark, with a touch of humour, that health is a precarious state that always ends badly… And yet, this maxim often applies in a much-mitigated way to those who place their trust in the intercession of Dona Lucilia.

Indeed, she would not be truly maternal were she to fail to provide for the needs of those who seek her aid, in every realm – including that of physical well-being. For this reason, it could even be said that, besides being a mother, she is a "physician," for she tends to her spiritual children with truly tireless solicitude.

A brief note of thanks

We need only entrust our concerns to her through a simple prayer to receive an answer. This is attested to by Mrs. Carolina Gomes Nascimento, from Vale de Nogueiras, Vila Real, Portugal:

"I wish to give thanks for a grace I received through Dona Lucilia. My niece had a very serious lung problem. I asked Dona Lucilia to intercede with God and the Sacred Heart of Jesus on her behalf. That grace was granted to me! I would be very grateful if this grace could be published. I have been a subscriber to the magazine for many years and feel comforted when I read it."

An unexplained malady during pregnancy

For Mrs. Michelle Cavalheiro, a resident of Mairiporã (São Paulo), the effective aid of Dona Lucilia came during an unusual ailment that arose while she was pregnant with her fourth child, John – a child she had, in fact, asked for and obtained through the intercession of the same kind lady.



Reproduction

Whether as a mother or a "physician", Dona Lucilia shows untiring solicitude towards her spiritual children

Dona Lucilia with her grandson

Approaching her sixth month of pregnancy, Michelle was in good health; her test results were excellent, and the baby's development was proceeding normally. However, one Saturday morning, she woke up with a severe headache radiating to her neck and a very strange feeling of malaise. In her own words:

"I dismissed it as a passing discomfort. I suggested to my husband and children that we walk to the mall near where we lived in Cajamar to see if I'd feel a bit better, since a little exercise like that can sometimes make you feel more energetic. But when we arrived at the mall, I realized things were getting worse…"

Michelle felt faint and feared she might pass out at any moment. Consequently, she left her husband and children in the play area and went to the mall's infirmary for help. The nurse on duty checked her blood pressure and found it to be very high. Alarmed, the nurse insisted that Michelle immediate-

ly take an ambulance to the hospital. However, needing to retrieve some items from home, she decided to take transport back there first and only then head to the emergency room.

At the hospital, tests confirmed her blood pressure was extremely high, though the cause could not be identified. Her condition was stabilized with medication, and Michelle was able to speak with the doctor to hear his assessment. While he lacked sufficient data, he believed she might be experiencing the onset of a heart attack.



Reproduction

Through the intercession of Dona Lucilia, Michelle obtained what medicine had been unable to provide, nor could even explain

Mrs. Michelle Cavalheiro with her husband and sons

An inexplicable improvement

After receiving the proper medication, Michelle spent the rest of the day doing well and returned home. Sunday was also a very quiet day, but on Monday the symptoms returned, forcing her to seek help at a Basic Health Unit near her home. Blood tests revealed concerning abnormalities, prompting her referral to the Santana de Parnaíba maternity hospital. The account continues:

"I asked my husband to take the children home to care for them so that I could return to the hospital if necessary. While I was alone waiting for the ambulance, I felt quite anxious and very distressed by everything that was happening. Then I remembered Dona Lucilia and said to her: 'You are a mother and understand what is happening – my fear of leaving the children and not being able to provide the support they need. See my concern for them and for myself; please watch over my health…'

"I began to pray to Dona Lucilia, earnestly asking and imploring her to help me. During the ambulance ride to the Santana de Parnaíba maternity hospital, I prayed the Rosary and fervently asked for her intercession."

Following hospital protocols, Michelle had to wait some time before being seen. When she was finally examined, the doctor found no trace of the ailment that had afflicted her. Astonished, she remarked to her patient: "What happened is inexplicable! Everything is in order with you... your health is good, everything is under control – your blood pressure, your heart – and the baby is doing very well, too… I cannot explain it!"

For Michelle, however, it was all clear: "At that moment, I thought: 'There is an explanation! Our Lady and Dona Lucilia helped me!'"

The remainder of the pregnancy proceeded without complications, and John was born in excellent health.

A test of faith

Further confirming the unfailing nature of Dona Lucilia's assistance, Michelle shares another grace obtained through her intercession:

"A more recent account involves a surgery I underwent to reposition my intestines; I had severe diastasis recti and multiple hernias, and surgery was the only solution."

The path to securing the procedure was arduous, but thanks to Dona Lucilia's help, the operation became possible. However, during the recovery process, Michelle encountered a problem with the incision healing, and an area of her abdomen began to show signs of necrosis. Her doctor was very concerned and prescribed various medications and wound dressings. Michelle explains:

"That night, I was deeply upset, disappointed, and saddened by the situation. I asked for Dona Lucilia's help, saying: 'Tomorrow this wound will be fine, because Dona Lucilia is going to help me!' It was a very strong declaration, full of conviction: 'I am certain that tomorrow my skin will be healthy! Dona Lucilia won't let it become necrotic!' I applied the dressing and went to sleep. But the next day, I felt somewhat apprehensive; the confidence of the day before – that faith – had been shaken… 'Will it really be better now?'"

Once again, Michelle saw proof that her prayer had not been in vain:

"When I removed the dressing, the wound was clean! A healthy scab had already formed! To me, this is one of the greatest proofs of Dona Lucilia's intercession in my life – showing how quickly she intercedes and how

she never fails to answer her spiritual children!"

Complications and drama in the hospital

Consoling the suffering, alleviating their pain, and supporting them in their needs are roles Dona Lucilia knows well how to fulfil.

From Lauro de Freitas (Bahia), Mrs. Edilene Oliveira Soares sent us a touching account of Dona Lucilia's intervention in her life following a severe ordeal.

Her husband had suffered an intestinal perforation during a medical procedure, triggering a terrible succession of ailments and setbacks over the course of a sixty-day hospital stay.

These were very difficult times for Edilene, during which she received support and comfort from her sister, Juliana – a great devotee of Dona Lucilia. Through her, Edilene learned about Dona Lucilia and turned to her as an intercessor for her husband's case. Here are her words:

"One day, when I called my sister, she told me about Dona Lucilia. To be honest, I didn't even know she existed. My sister told me she had lit a candle asking Dona Lucilia to take charge of everything, to heal my husband, and to look after both him and me."

The situation kept worsening, and her husband's medical condition was dire. Several surgeries failed to yield the expected results, and a severe infection compromised his recovery, triggering seizures that led to a twenty-day stay in the ICU.

He was transferred from hospital to hospital; further procedures were urgently needed, yet her husband's body was not responding. It was not even possible to insert a feeding tube. Her husband's suffering was so intense that he believed he was not going to survive, and Edilene, who faithfully remained by his side, was disheartened and exhausted.

Here is how she recounts that ordeal to us: "Despite my faith, there were moments when I thought he wouldn't pull through, especially given his age. But I prayed fervently to God and Our Lady of Fatima, and I also made sure to pray to Dona Lucilia. Through abundant grace and blessings, he recovered enough for the doctors to decide to discharge him!"



For Edilene, the comfort and affection she received from Dona Lucilia were an assurance that this kind mother would always be at her side

Mrs. Edilene Oliveira Soares

"I am with you…"

During the first week after they both returned home, Edilene had a very unusual dream:

"I saw a lady. I was weeping bitterly with her, as if my husband had passed away. But she comforted me, saying it was not yet the moment, for his time had not come. At a quick glance, I thought that lady was my grandmother. I was startled, because I didn't know if I was asleep or awake… Suddenly, I felt someone caressing my head and gently stroking my hands and arms with great love.

"Then I woke up, looked beside my bed, and saw that same lady – white-haired and bearing a resemblance to my grandmother. I looked at her and asked, 'Grandma, is that you?' She replied, 'No, I am not your grandmother, but I have been – and am – with you at every moment.' That was when I realized it was Dona Lucilia – the very lady my sister had told me about and even sent me a photo of! It was her!"

Happy and filled with wonder to have her there, Edilene sat up in bed to see her better, but at that instant, Dona Lucilia vanished…

She concludes her account thus: "After that vision, I wept profusely, for I had seen her so clearly beside me, stroking my arms and caressing my face and head, blessing me and saying that she had been – and would be – with me!"

There is no better remedy for a suffering heart than a mother's comfort and affection. For Edilene, this experience with Dona Lucilia – after such a long ordeal – was a sign that the dark clouds were finally lifting and that Dona Lucilia, from eternity, would care for her like the tenderest of mothers.

May these simple testimonies help us grow in confidence and devotion to Dona Lucilia, certain that for us, too, she will be a powerful intercessor, a physician, and a most loving mother!

…that the name "Eve" was not chosen by chance?

The reader may well have felt a certain perplexity upon encountering the passage in Genesis: "The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (3:20). After all, what is the connection between "the mother of all the living" and the name "Eve"?

In Western culture, the choice of a name often reflects various desires: to honour an ancestor, follow a trend, or simply to satisfying a preference for a particular sound… In Eastern traditions, however, the custom of giving new family members a symbolic name – such as *Swan* or *Wall* – endures to the present day, expressing the hopes parents place in that soul.

This custom prevailed in biblical times, as seen in the aforementioned Genesis passage. *Eve* – *Hawwah* in Hebrew – means *life*. The verse could thus be read: "Adam named his wife Life," indicating her mission as a mother. In the Greek Septuagint version, this meaning was preserved by translating Eve as ζωή (*life*). In the Latin Vulgate, however, the name was merely transliterated from the Hebrew, giving rise to similar versions in Romance languages and other modern tongues.

Upon leaving Paradise, Adam seemed to remind his wife that, even in their harsh exile, the divine covenant remained *alive* in the promise of offspring. Far from being merely the cause of death, she was – in the divine plan – *Eve*: a prefiguration of the one who would be called the *New Eve*, Mary, who was destined to give birth to humanity to true Life. ✣



Reproduction

Mary, the New Eve - Church of the Immaculate Conception, Montreal

…that the dead can be helped by the living?

Charity is the bond that unites the members of the Church and, as the Apostle proclaimed, it "never ends" (1 Cor 13:8), for "neither death, nor life […] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:38-39). This is true in a special manner regarding those who have already passed from this life to the next, since, in a certain way, they remain ever alive in the memory of their loved ones (cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, Suppl., q.71, a.2).

For this reason, even those undergoing purification in the fire of Purgatory can benefit from the aid of the living. How? According to St. Thomas (cf. *ibid.*, a.9), there are three principal works that most benefit the deceased, on account of their intimate link to the communication of the virtue of charity.

First is the Blessed Eucharist, the Sacrament of unity containing Him in whom the entire Church is grounded. Hence the importance of requesting Mass intentions for the deceased. Almsgiving also plays a role, as it is an expression of charity. Finally, prayer is of preeminent value, for it entails a more direct relationship with the person for whom one prays.

In short, the suffrages offered by the living do not transform the state of the dead from misery to beatitude; rather, they contribute primarily to mitigating the expiatory punishment through the charity and intention directed towards them.

Let us not, then, miss the opportunity to help the souls of those who have gone before us, bearing in mind this indisputable truth: one day, we too may depend on the aid of the members of the Church Militant who, through charity and the Communion of Saints, are united with the Church Suffering. ✣



Francisco Lecaros

The Mass benefitting the Church Militant and the Church Suffering - Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Montevideo (Uruguay)



Photos: Frank Murphy

Canada – On September 6, the house of the Heralds of the Gospel located just north of Toronto welcomed members of the "Mary, Queen of All Hearts" Shrine Apostolate for another annual gathering. The event included a procession through the property praying the Rosary and the celebration of Holy Mass, followed by a time of fellowship.





Photos: Aida Linares

Cristiane Marques

Guatemala – Bringing comfort and hope, the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary visited the Ceibal General Accident Hospital in Mixco on August 20 (photos 1, 2 and 3), and the Day & Night geriatric home in Guatemala City on September 4 (photos 4 and 5). On September 24, the Villa de las Niñas School, also in the capital, welcomed the Queen of Heaven, with one hundred and seventy students making their consecration to Jesus through Mary on that occasion, according to the method of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort (photo 6).





Photos: Javier García







Jesse Arce

Colombia – Priests from various dioceses and religious institutes across the country gathered at the Our Lady of Fatima Church complex in Tocancipá for a retreat preached by Fr. Felipe de Azevedo Ramos, EP, from September 22 to 24 (photo 1). The opening Mass was presided over by Bishop Héctor Cubillos Peña of Zipaquirá (photo 2). During that month, the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary visited several communities in the Diocese of Palmira, including the Holy Family Parish in the same city (photo 3) and Immaculate Conception Parish in Pradera (photo 4). On September 18, the concert "A Journey from Prayer to Hope" brought together, at the aforementioned Our Lady of Fatima Church, the Colombian National Symphony Orchestra and Choir, joined by the Schola Cantorum of the Virgin of Fatima for the final pieces (photo 5).







Photos: Aldo Leone

South Africa – The Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary spread her blessings over the Johannesburg metropolitan area, visiting several homes in Germiston, Lenasia and Florida (photos 1 and 2), as well as St. Benedict Parish in Sebokeng (photo 3).



Ivo Criollo





José Cali

Ecuador – On August 15, the faithful of the Parishes of Mary the Queen (photo 1) and St. Andrew (photo 2), both in the city of Guayaquil, honoured the Assumption of Mary into Heaven with the recitation of a dawn Rosary. Days later, the Blessed Virgin also received expressions of devotion from her children at the Parish of Our Lady of Unity, in the same city, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the "Mary, Queen of All Hearts" Shrine Apostolate (photo 3).



Preentham D'Silva





Rosana González







Photos: Francisco Espinola

Paraguay – Members of the Heralds of the Gospel present in Paraguay enlivened the festivities in honour of the Patroness of Our Lady of the Nativity Parish in Quyquyhó, on September 6 (photo 1), and of the Ko'e Pyahu Penitentiary Ranch in Asunción, on September 24 (photo 2). A blessed Marian mission took place at Blessed Sacrament Parish, also in the capital, on August 29 and 30 (photos 3 to 6).





Photos: Elyton de Araújo



Eduardo Injoque





Mary Carmen González



Photos: Marta Lucila Sousa

Brazil – From September 21- 24, Fr. Carlos Javier Werner Benjumea, EP, preached the annual retreat for the Bragança Paulista Diocesan clergy, held at the Itaici Monastery in Indaiatuba (São Paulo), with the presence of diocesan Bishop Sérgio Aparecido Colombo and over eighty priests (photos 1 and 2). Days later, on the feast of the three Archangels, Our Lady of Grace Parish was consecrated to St. Michael during a Holy Mass at the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary in Caieiras (photo 3). Also during this period, the faithful of St. Agnes Chapel, part of the same parish, received visits from the statue of the Blessed Virgin in their homes and businesses (photos 4 to 6).





Jano Aracena

Peru – On September 12, the Parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the city of Pimentel, Chiclayo Diocese, received the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, an occasion on which many of the faithful consecrated themselves as slaves of love to Mary Most Holy, according to the method of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort.

A Pilgrimage to the Roman Basilicas

Let us journey to the city of the martyrs and become enchanted by the splendours of the Mystical Bride of Christ, manifested in her churches.



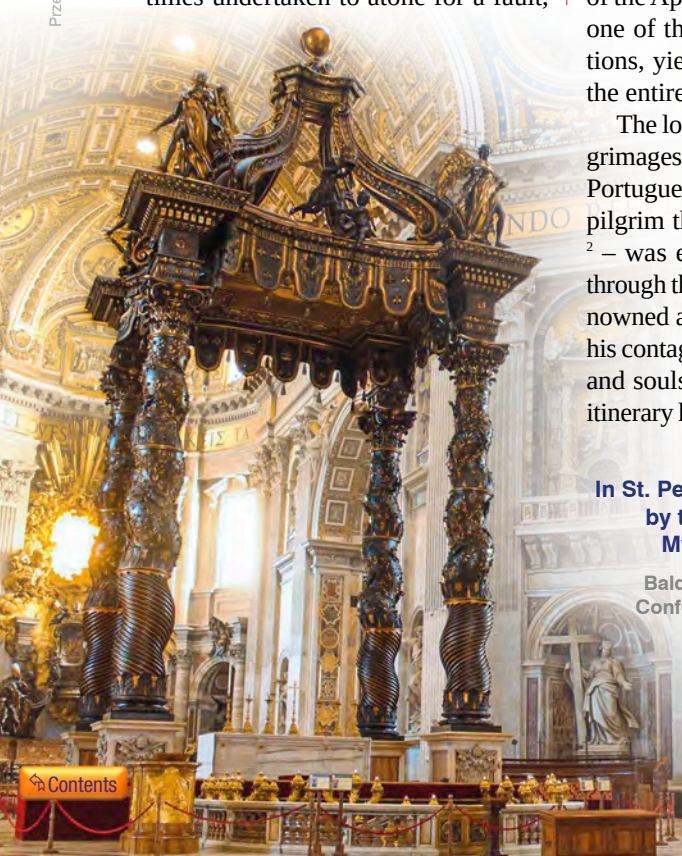
Sara María Gutiérrez Fernández

I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'" (Ps 122:1). These words, spoken by the psalmist in reference to Jerusalem – the seat of religious worship in the Old Testament – apply to one of Christianity's most traditional customs: the pilgrimage.

Born of the faithful's devotion to shrines and sacred sites, the pilgrimage is a time-honoured act of piety, sometimes undertaken to atone for a fault, to implore special graces, or to fulfil a vow. The earliest pilgrimages were generally directed toward the Holy Land, where Our Lord Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again for our salvation. With the spread of the Faith and the construction of churches throughout the world, other locations began to receive such visits; prominent among them was the Roman capital – city of the Successor of Peter and repository of the Apostles' relics – which became one of the most sought-after destinations, yielding great spiritual fruit for the entire Mystical Body of Christ.[1]

The long and fervent tradition of pilgrimages to the Eternal City – which in Portuguese, eventually earned for the pilgrim the synonymous title *romeiro* [2] – was enriched in the 16th century through the efforts of St. Philip Neri, renowned among his contemporaries for his contagious joy in the service of God and souls. This holy man initiated an itinerary known as the *Visit to the Seven Churches*, a long walk which takes in Rome's most important basilicas, interspersed with meditations on the Passion of Christ and pleasant refreshments.

Would you, dear reader, like to learn a little about these historic and blessed Roman churches and share, in some way, in the graces proper to a pilgrimage? Through these lines, I invite you to embark on a journey to the land of the martyrs. Since the spirit is free from the limitations of distance and time, to fly wherever it wishes, let us together follow the itinerary popularized by St. Philip Neri.



Przemek Pietrak (CC by-sa 3.0)

In St. Peter's Basilica, we are struck by the magnificence of the Mystical Bride of Christ

Baldachin over the Altar of the Confession - St. Peter's Basilica

Dazzling and inviting beauty

To begin with, let us walk to St. Peter's Basilica, built on the very spot where, in the year 64 AD, the first Pope was crucified upside down, as he did not consider himself worthy of dying like Our Lord.

It is said that, around the year 80, Pope Anacletus built a small chapel over the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, which was replaced in the 4th century by a large basilica erected by Emperor Constantine and his mother, St. Helena. Between the 15th and 17th centuries, this second early Christian building gave way to the Renaissance church we see today, the fourth centenary of whose consecration is cel-

Contents



Thaler Tamas (CC by-sa 4.0)

NikonZ7II (CC by-sa 4.0)

The Basilica of St. Paul captivates by conveying something of the spirit of this ardent herald of Christ; the Basilica of St. Sebastian has the blessings of its patron Saint in its very foundations

Central nave of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls; inset, the façade of St. Sebastian Outside the Walls

ebrated on November 18 this year. It is currently the Catholic church with the largest internal floor area: 15,160 square metres.

Let us cross the vast square, dominated by the obelisk – a red granite monolith over twenty-five metres high, brought from Egypt, which serves as a sundial – and surrounded by Bernini's colonnade, which evokes the keys to Heaven and earth entrusted by the Divine Redeemer to the Head of the Church (cf. Mt 16:18–19). Entering the sanctuary, we are struck by the magnificence of the Mystical Bride of Christ reflected in its proportions and in its mosaics, images, tapestries and stones…

High on the walls, a golden band can be noticed running the entire length of the basilica's perimeter, bearing passages from Scripture relating to the Apostle Peter, written in Latin and Greek.

As we stand before the Altar of the Confession, highlighted by the magnificent central baldachin, let us pause for a few mom ents of prayer. The most precious relics in this basilica are housed in the four niches in the walls surrounding it. Among them are a fragment of the Holy Cross, found by St. Helena, the Veil of Veronica and the spear of St. Longinus.

Beneath the papal altar, in the Vatican Necropolis, we may venerate the relics of St. Peter, paying them a profound act of devotion before moving on.

Back at the upper level, looking up we can see, in the background, the stained-glass window depicting the Divine Paraclete and, below it, the authentic chair of the first Pope, supported by four bronze figures representing St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom and St. Athanasius.

A pleasant encounter with the Apostle to the Gentiles

Continuing our pilgrimage, we now head towards the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls.

Before entering this second church, let us note that, once again, the building is no longer the original one, also erected on the orders of Constantine and consecrated by Pope St. Sylvester I around the year 330. Following a devastating fire in 1823, the basilica had to be rebuilt. The new edifice, nevertheless, still houses the intact remains of the Apostle to the Gentiles, enchanting visitors from all over the world with its gentle and majestic charm, and it will certainly convey to us something of the spirit of this ardent herald of Christ.

Proceeding through the atrium leading to the entrance, we see a statue of St. Paul standing at its centre. With a majestic bearing, a contemplative gaze and sword in hand, his figure conveys at once piety and combativeness, gentleness and boldness, chastity and uncompromising resolve – harmonious virtues that every baptized soul ought to admire. This impression, moreover, is heightened when, upon entering the sanctuary, the pilgrim approaches the Gothic-style baldachin covering the high altar. This marks the holiest place in the basilica: the tomb of the Apostle to the Nations.

At this point in our pilgrimage, St. Paul is waiting attentively to hear all our prayers. Let us offer them with confidence.

Venerating the relics of a soldier of Christ

As we resume our journey, the route takes us a short distance along the Via Appia, one of the main roads leading to the capital of the ancient Roman Empire.

We are retracing Peter's steps when, seized with fear, he decided to flee the Eternal City to escape death. Halfway there, the Divine Master appeared to him and, asked by the Apostle where He was going, replied: "I am going to Rome, to be crucified once more." Strengthened by this vision, the Pontiff repented and returned to the City, ready to lay down his life for the Redeemer.

Further along the road lies the catacomb of St. Sebastian, a Christian



NateBergin (CC by 4.0)



Vlad Lesnov (CC by 3.0)

The Basilica of St. John Lateran, the oldest Catholic church in Rome, is the mother of all churches; in the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, we find priceless treasures from the Saviour's Passion

At left, façade of the Basilica of St. John Lateran; at right, main altar of the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem

Roman soldier martyred by Emperor Diocletian at the end of the 3rd century. Above this underground cemetery, which received the mortal remains of the holy martyr, stands the basilica dedicated to him, where we venerate some of the instruments used in his martyrdom: an arrow that pierced his body and a section of the pillar to which he was bound.

Mother of all churches

Our next destination is the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the oldest Catholic church in Rome, and therefore regarded as the *mother of all churches*.

Built on land that once belonged to the Laterani family – from whom the name *Lateran* derives – the cathedral in Rome that we are now visiting, together with the buildings surrounding it, was once the residence of the Pope and the Curia, as well as the venue for five ecumenical councils.

This precious sanctuary treasures the skulls of St. Peter and St. Paul, as well as a wooden altar, kept within the main altar, upon which these two great Apostles celebrated the Holy Sacrifice, according to tradition. Therefore, dear pilgrim, this is a basilica well-suited for us to ask for an increase in faith and Eucharistic devotion. Kneeling before these treasures of Christendom, let us raise our prayers to Heaven.

Sanctuary of the Cross

Going on a little further, let us visit the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, which conserves various relics of the Saviour's Passion, such as fragments of the Holy Cross, one of the nails that pierced Jesus' limbs, the sacred sponge with which He was offered vinegar, and part of the *titulus crucis*, the sign affixed to the cross bearing the inscription INRI – *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudæorum*.

All these relics are housed in a chapel at the rear of this basilica, known as the *Sanctuary of the Cross*. At its entrance, before we adore the instruments of the Passion, let us also venerate a fragment of the cross of St. Dismas, the good thief, an excellent intercessor who can obtain for us from the Divine Lamb complete repentance for our sins and the supreme gift of eternal salvation.

Before taking our leave, we will walk through the rest of the church and follow, in the paintings that adorn it, the story of the discovery of the Holy Cross by St. Helena. Painted in the 15th century, these works of art depict scenes such as the discovery of the sacred relic amongst the excavations and the resurrection of a young man whose body had been laid upon it.

Basilica of a hero of the Faith

As we draw near to the end of our journey, let us pause before a column topped by a statue of St. Lawrence. It marks our arrival at the Patriarchal Basilica of St. Lawrence Outside the Walls, which houses the relics of the holy deacon, who was cruelly martyred on a gridiron on August 10, 258.

Tradition tells us that, at a certain point during his torment, Lawrence said to his executioner: "I am already well roasted on this side. Turn me over."[3] A heroic cry, without doubt,

from a soul who carried his love for Jesus Christ to its final consequences!

May this hero of the Faith obtain for us from God the grace to imitate his virtues in the service of the Holy Church.

With Mary and the Infant Jesus

Our pilgrimage finally culminates at the Basilica of St. Mary Major, the first Marian church of Christendom.

Built on the site chosen by the Mother of God herself – revealed in a dream to Pope Liberius and a wealthy senator named John, one August night in the 4th century – this basilica holds a special grace. Our Lady asked these two men to build a temple in her honour on the place where it would snow that night, in the height of the Roman summer… The following day, the spot chosen by the Virgin was completely covered in snow. This miracle, incidentally, is depicted in the exquisite mosaics which we can admire through the arches of the gallery.

Let us descend the staircase next to the high altar, to the Crypt of the Holy Manger. Here, in the heart of the basilica, we are able to venerate the boards of the manger of Jesus and to savour something of the Divine Infant's presence and sweetness, imploring Him to bless us at the end of this blessed pilgrimage.

Before withdrawing, however, let us visit the Pauline Chapel in the left-hand aisle, where there is a precious icon of the Blessed Virgin, attributed to St. Luke the Evangelist: *Salus Populi Romani*, the gate of salvation not only for the Roman people, but for the whole world.

In the diversity of the churches, one spirit

As our spirit reluctantly returns to the tasks of everyday life, let us reflect one last time on all that we have considered in the course of these lines.

The Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church is, as Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira observes, "an immense soul, which portrays itself through a thousand things, possessing movements, grandeur, holiness and perfection, as if it were a single soul expressed through all the Catholic churches of the world."[4] And, on our pilgrimage, we have contemplated, as it were, a photo album that has brought into sharper focus before our eyes the holiness, grandeur and magnificence of the Mystical Bride of Christ, whose children we are.

Now, if we are children of the Church, we must always be imbued with her spirit, which translates especially into a serious attitude towards the struggles of earthly life, a constant elevation of thought, the practice of justice – which consists in giving everyone their due value – and into wisdom, which leads us to consider everything through the prism of the divine will.

May we, through the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, so assimilate this spirit that, at the end of our pilgrimage in this world, we may exclaim, paraphrasing St. Paul: "it is no longer I who live, but the Mystical Body of Christ that lives in me!" (cf. Gal 2:20). ✣

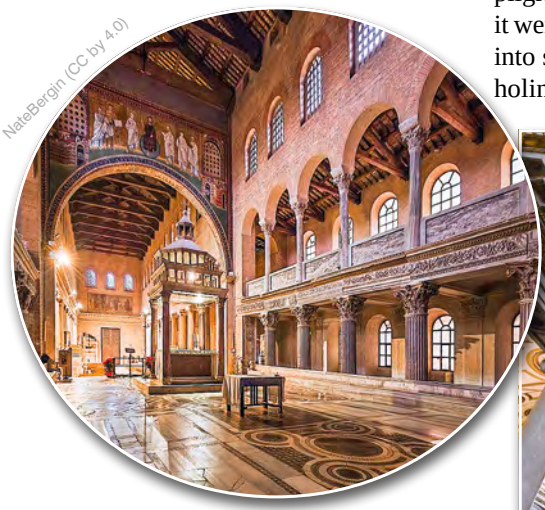
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[1] Cf. VICCHI, Roberta. *Las basílicas mayores de Roma*. Florencia: Scala, 1999, p.5-6.

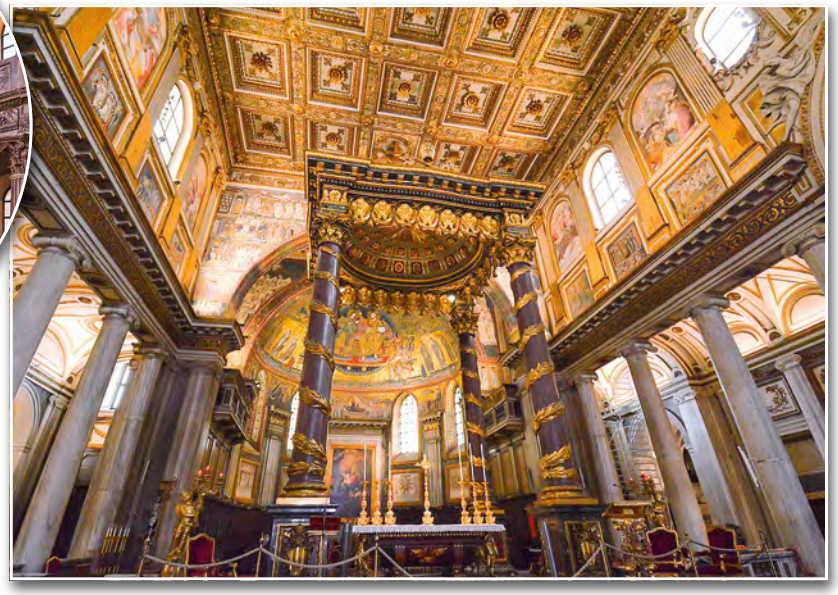
[2] Cf. ibid., p.6.

[3] LANZI, Fernando; LANZI, Gioia. *Atlas de las peregrinaciones. Santuarios cristianos del mundo.* Madrid: San Pablo, 2005, p.80.

[4] CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. Amor à Igreja [Love for the Church]. In: *Dr. Plinio.* São Paulo. Year II. No. 15 (June, 1999), p.21.



NateBergin (CC by 4.0)



Mentnafunangann (CC by-sa 4.0)

In the Basilica of St. Lawrence, we honour a celebrated martyr; in St. Mary Major, the Gate of Salvation to the whole world

Above, the interior of the Basilica of St. Lawrence Outside the Walls; at right, the main altar of the Basilica of St. Mary Major

The Wealth of the Poor

Would it not be better to strip the gold from this church and turn it into provisions for the needy? St. Francis of Assisi answers.



Ângelo Francisco Neto Martins

Looking at the photos illustrating these pages, we are immediately struck by a sense of exuberant, almost excessive magnificence. One might even say we are contemplating a civil war of colours!

Blue has scaled the ceiling and claimed dominion over it, yet polychrome ribs and golden stars rise up in rebellion, piercing it with numerous breaches. Further along, the colour of the sky retreats before the gold of massive medallions depicting sacred figures.

On the walls, the columns refuse to settle for a single hue, daringly blending indigo and red. Meanwhile, the frescoes – spanning from side to side, top to bottom – vie for every square metre, seemingly locked in a contest to see which one will come out as the most vibrant. They avoid eclipsing each other only because they are all the work of Giotto, one of history's greatest artists. Restless colours spill beyond the stonework to invade the windows: the stained glass, which both rivals and accentuates the splendour of the walls.

All this colourful clamour would, in fact, turn into a civil war were it not for the width of the nave and the height of the ogives, which create a clearing spacious enough to accommodate, in fraternal harmony, such profuse colour and beauty.

* * *

All this splendour reveals a truth to us: those who built this church sought to erect a stepping-stone to Heaven.

But… what about the poor? Would it not be better to strip the gold from the building and transform it into provisions for the needy? Why not turn those stones into bread for the hungry?

To the tempter who made Him a similar proposal, Our Lord Jesus Christ replied that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). And proceeding from the mouth of God is not only the Revelation inscribed in the Bible, but also that which is embodied in created things.

Indeed, creation is a book that speaks of its Maker, and creatures are so many words of the Almighty. However mute they may seem to be, they "are telling the glory of God" (Ps 18:2). That is why St. Francis of Assisi invited the material universe to honour the Invisible One: "Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Brother Sun, who […] bears the likeness of You, Most High."[1]

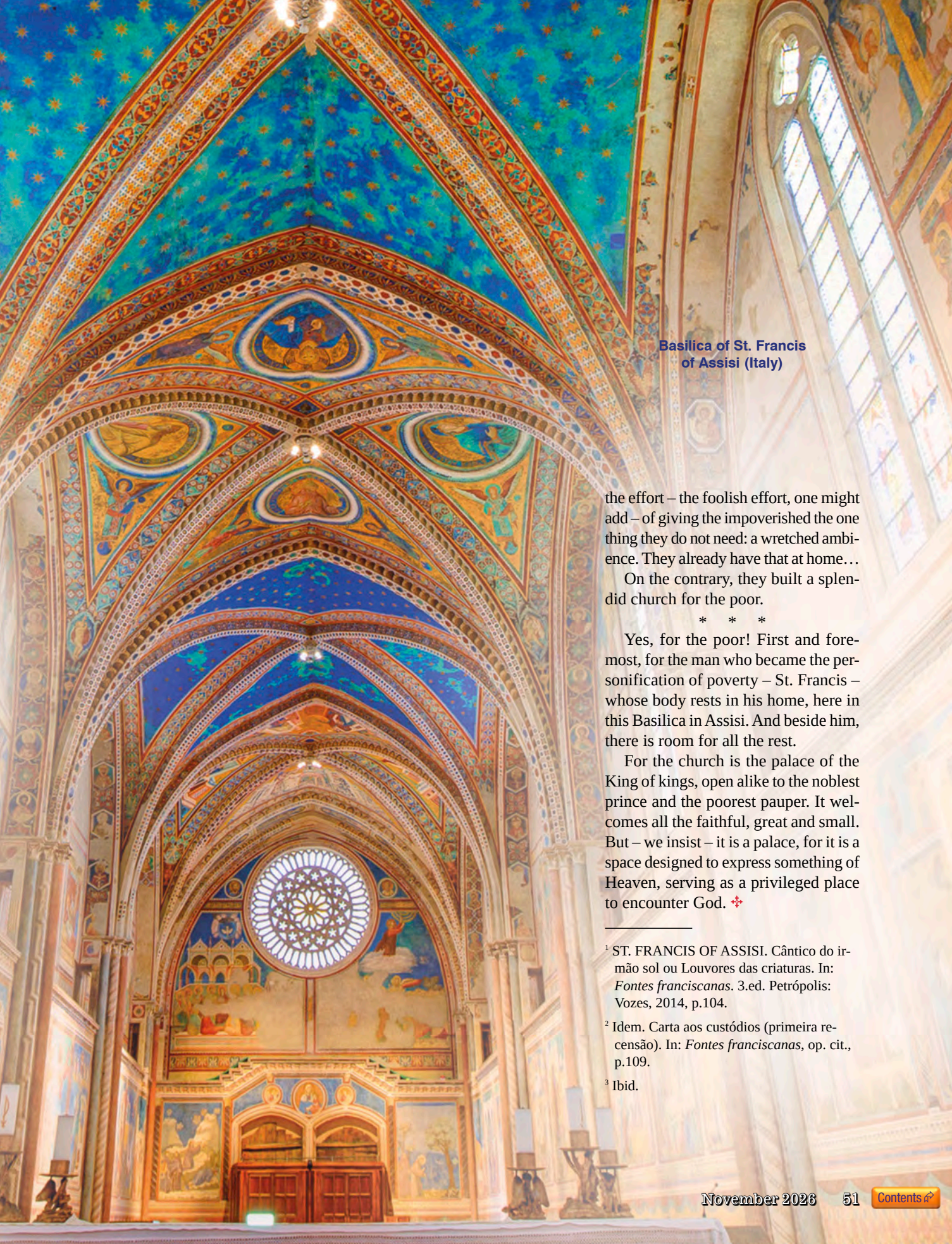
And since creation is thus a compendium of metaphors for God, the *Poverello* instructed his mendicant sons to build churches and adorn worship just as the Eternal One created the universe: beautifully, magnificently, and boundlessly.

The sacred space was to become a mirror of Uncreated Beauty and a fitting tabernacle for the Eucharist: "If anywhere," wrote the Saint of Assisi, "the Most Holy Body of the Lord is kept in a very poor manner, contrary to the prescriptions of the Church, let it be placed by them in a prominent, precious place, carried with great veneration."[2] Therefore, "chalices, corporals, altar ornaments, and everything pertaining to the Sacrifice must be precious."[3]

In short, he taught them to imitate the model already established by God – the Heavenly Jerusalem – whose splendour was compared to "a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal" (Rv 21:11).

Honour and credit go to the Franciscans who heeded their father and erected this temple! They spared themselves

Gustavo Kralj



Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi (Italy)

the effort – the foolish effort, one might add – of giving the impoverished the one thing they do not need: a wretched ambience. They already have that at home…

On the contrary, they built a splendid church for the poor.

* * *

Yes, for the poor! First and foremost, for the man who became the personification of poverty – St. Francis – whose body rests in his home, here in this Basilica in Assisi. And beside him, there is room for all the rest.

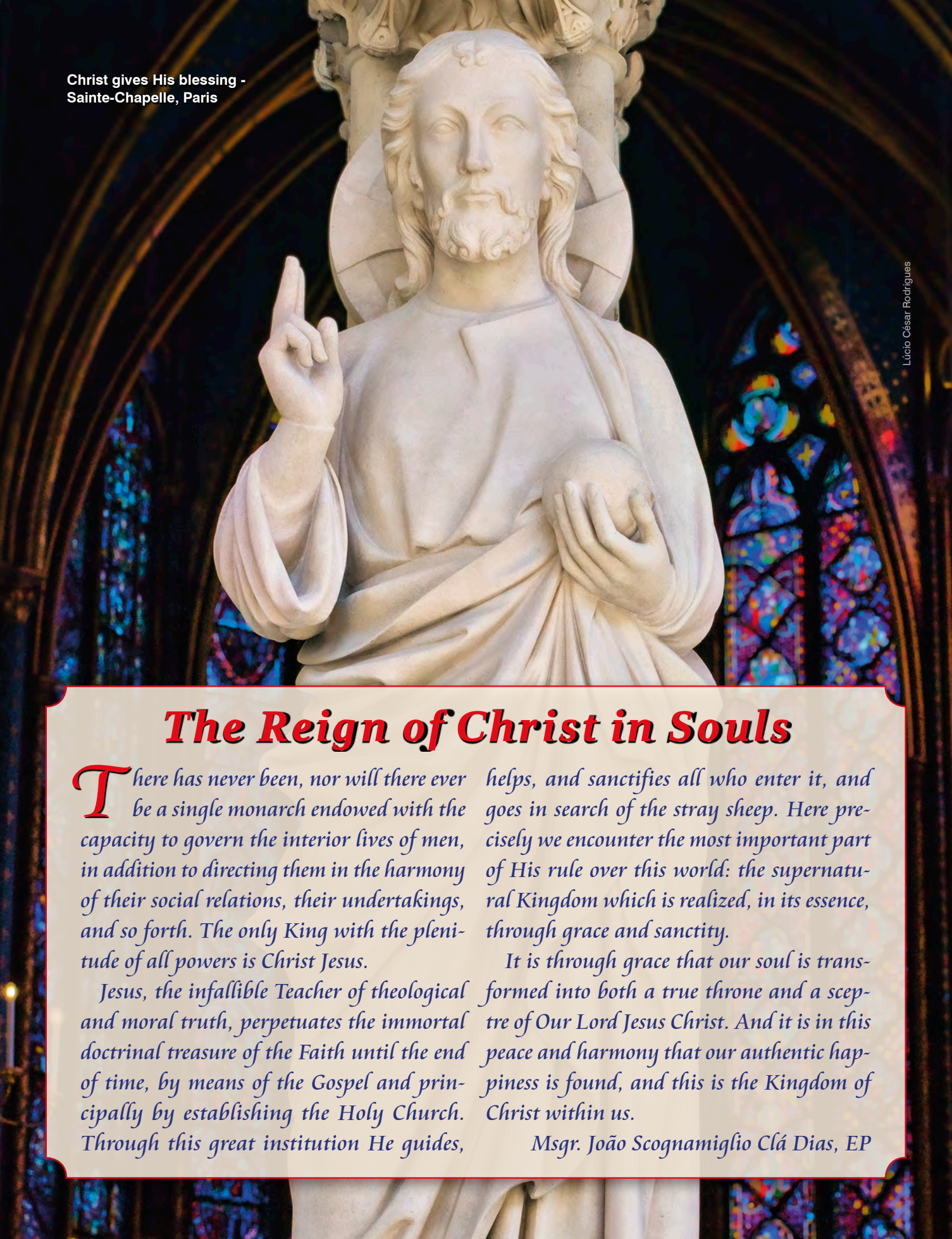
For the church is the palace of the King of kings, open alike to the noblest prince and the poorest pauper. It welcomes all the faithful, great and small. But – we insist – it is a palace, for it is a space designed to express something of Heaven, serving as a privileged place to encounter God. ✣

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[1] ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI. Cântico do irmão sol ou Louvores das criaturas. In: *Fontes franciscanas*. 3.ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2014, p.104.

[2] Idem. Carta aos custódios (primeira recensão). In: *Fontes franciscanas*, op. cit., p.109.

[3] Ibid.



Christ gives His blessing - Sainte-Chapelle, Paris

Lúcio César Rodrigues

The Reign of Christ in Souls

There has never been, nor will there ever be a single monarch endowed with the capacity to govern the interior lives of men, in addition to directing them in the harmony of their social relations, their undertakings, and so forth. The only King with the plenitude of all powers is Christ Jesus.

Jesus, the infallible Teacher of theological and moral truth, perpetuates the immortal doctrinal treasure of the Faith until the end of time, by means of the Gospel and principally by establishing the Holy Church. Through this great institution He guides, helps, and sanctifies all who enter it, and goes in search of the stray sheep. Here precisely we encounter the most important part of His rule over this world: the supernatural Kingdom which is realized, in its essence, through grace and sanctity.

It is through grace that our soul is transformed into both a true throne and a scepter of Our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is in this peace and harmony that our authentic happiness is found, and this is the Kingdom of Christ within us.

Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP