
THE BEAUTY OF OUR LITURGY

St. Benedict Orthodox Church
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WEEK II~ Finding God in Beauty and Mystery

I. To be a Christian is to be full of Awe

- One day, a group of young children asked C. S. Lewis if it were possible to get into Narnia. Lewis replied that the only way, as far as he knew, is through death...But then he added, "Perhaps some very good people get just a tiny glimpse before then." In many Christian circles, our religion has become overly rational or sentimental. I we can thank C. S. Lewis for giving the world one thing, it is that he reminded Christians of the mysticism so integral to Christianity.
- Psalm 2:11 – "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling."
 - What does it mean to stand before God in Awe?

II. Into the Region of Awe

- "Into the region of awe, in deepest solitude there is a road right out of the self, a commerce with...the naked Other, imageless...unknown, undefined, desired." ~ Lewis. *Surprised by Joy*
- The purpose of the Mass is not to give us any emotional highs or sentimental butterflies. The purpose is to fling us into the region of awe.
- Reverend Harding: "If there is no music, there is no mystery. If there is no mystery, there is no God. If there is no mystery, there is no faith." ~ Barchester Chronicles

III. The Role of Beauty in the Mass

- **The Role of Beauty**
 - "Beauty, then, is not mere decoration, but rather an essential element of the liturgical action, since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation. These considerations should make us realize the care which is needed, if the liturgical action is to reflect its innate splendour." ~ Pope Benedict XVI
- **Beauty is not necessary**
 - "Unnecessary it is indeed, for we are beyond the categories of 'necessary.' Beauty is never 'necessary,' 'functional' or 'useful.' And when, expecting someone whom we love, we put a beautiful tablecloth on the table and decorate it with candles and flowers, we do all this not out of necessity, but out of love. And the Church is love, expectation and joy" ~ Fr. Schmemmann
- **Beauty is the door to God**
 - "For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator." ~ Wis 13: 5

IV. A Glance at the Splendors of Rome

- “If we, as American orthodox Christians, are to partake of the depth and richness of the Church’s architectural tradition, we must come to understand these origins and meanings. We must see things as they once were seen, because modern sight is blinded. We must relearn that mass and strength are godly, that mysterious light is holy. We must see icons as theology, our vision of Christ and the saints, whom we must desire to see stand once again in their heavenly order. We must feel architecture to be more than structure. Its geometries represent the highest truths, and cannot be built casually or without dignity. And we must be mindful of Rome, for Rome showed us the beauty of divine authority. To forget this beauty is to lose sight of the heavenly Kingdom. Above all we must learn to desire beauty. It was not for theology or propriety that the Byzantines so adorned their temples. It was for beauty. In beauty lies truth, and by it we show our love for god.” ~ *Andrew Gould*

V. The Role of Mystery

- **The Brink of Chaos**
 - The Liturgy is the experience of being brought “to the brink of chaos in the presence of the living God” ~ *Aidan Kavanaugh*
- **Why pray in Latin?**
 - 1. For catholicity sake; 2. To connect us to the ancientness of our Church; 3. For enhance a sense of mystery

VI. Our Need for Mystery & How the Liturgy Meets it

- “The human soul needs mystery to thrive. Deep down, sometimes very deep down, we crave an experience that is disorienting in its wonder, something so marvelous we forget ourselves in the face of it. We want something that is at once knowable and unknowable, within our grasp and beyond our reach. . . . Good and true liturgy is like that. It draws us upward and out of ourselves. It is disorienting and uncomfortable in a healthy and joyful way. Holiness, if it is real, should feel disorienting. So give yourself permission to *not* know and understand everything that is going on in the Mass. Some priestly gestures and prayers are meant to be beyond your reach, and you aren’t meant to grasp their every meaning. That is just how it is. Embrace it. Let the mystery wash over you and transform you.” ~ *Sam Guzman*

VII. A Taste of Otherness

- Incense: Other than being a means for prayer and worship, incense has a further purpose, to add to the element of mystery in worship. Incense creates an “aura of otherness.”

VIII. Cultivating Awe

- **How do we enter more deeply into the liturgy?**
 - By embracing its mystery and beauty, and in doing so, cultivating a sense of awe
- Verses: “Be stunned and amazed” (Isaiah 29:9); “Stop and consider God’s wonders.” (Job 37:14); “Serve the Lord with reverent fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:11); “The awe of God is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10).