



Seek the Lord

ARCHBISHOP DENNIS M. SCHNURR

We live in a culture which increasingly focuses on individuality and the immediacy of the here and now. Rarely do we elevate our gaze to the transcendent. Modern voices proclaim the self-identifying and self-determining individual as important above all else, rather than reserving that distinction for God. Western society is at risk of losing the rich cultural heritage built on the firm foundation of the Judeo-Christian worldview. We, as Christians, therefore have the opportunity to instill back into our culture those things which reveal the goodness and love of God and the truths which He fashioned into the order of creation.

One means by which we can do this is through the arts. In the first centuries of the Church's life, her members used art to reveal the mysteries of the faith. In the catacombs of Rome, the first Christians depicted scenes from the Scriptures as reminders of God's goodness and love. Images of the Good Shepherd, the three young men in the fiery furnace, and acanthus leaves and evergreens reminded the faithful that even death does not have the final word over God's mercy and the hope of redemption.

Over time, as the faith spread and the arts became more refined, the same truths of salvation would be revealed through sculpture, paintings, stained glass, music and even architecture. Gothic cathedrals, with their soaring walls and vaulted ceilings, draw people up into something beyond everyday life on earth. Even smaller churches and chapels reflect divine beauty when constructed with care and adorned

in ways that make present the peace of the eternal homeland toward which we are journeying. Similarly, the harmonies of Palestrina and both the power and delicacy of the pipe organ and other forms of sacred music have the ability to impact the human soul in a unique way, transporting it to a brief foretaste of the angelic choirs of heaven.

When asked at a gathering with priests in northern Italy about the importance of beauty being linked to truth in art, Pope Benedict XVI said, "Christian art is a rational art [...] but it is the artistic expression of a greatly expanded reason, in which heart and reason encounter each other. This is the point. I believe that in a certain way this is proof of the truth of Christianity: Heart and reason encounter one another, beauty and truth converge, and the more that we ourselves succeed in living in the beauty of truth, the more that faith will be able to return to being creative in our time too, and to express itself in a convincing form of art."

Art has the power to remind us of the beauty to which we are called, the beauty from which and for which we were created. Life is beautiful. And it will be even more beautiful when we experience it in its fullness in heaven. In the meantime, though, artists are called by God to make the beauty of His truth tangible in ways which our limited human senses can both understand and appreciate. May God bless all those who embark on this sacred endeavor to, bit by bit, draw out from paint, glass, stone, sound and other media a hint of what awaits us in the world to come!