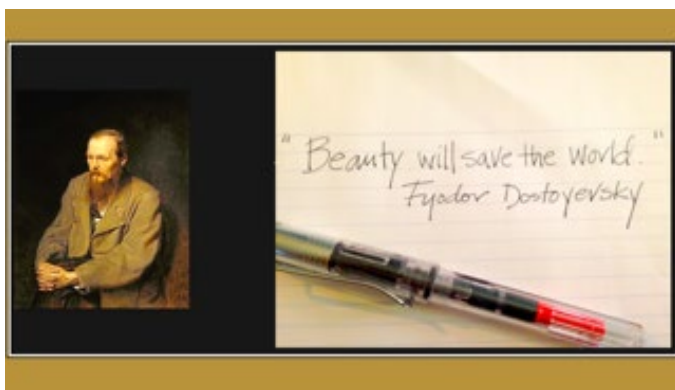


What is the Gospel? (Part 5)

We have been exploring different layers of the gospel. This week, we want to see how our own beautiful lives reveal the gospel — God’s beauty in us. In the Western church, salvation culminates with heaven. In the East, salvation culminates in the transformation of the self into the beauty of God. Because of sin, the image of God in humanity has been marred and defaced. In Christ, God is transforming us into beautiful icons that reflect God’s glory. A line from Orthodox liturgy proclaims: “He has restored the sullied image to its ancient glory, filling it with the divine beauty.” God, the Ultimate Artist, is beautifying us, and our beautiful lives becomes sacraments of the divine. As we grow in works of love so beauty grows in us (as Augustine wrote — “for love is the beauty of the soul”).

The following quotes give a wide historical perspective on the value of beauty, where all beauty originates, and the glorious reality of God’s beauty in us. There is much to reflect upon.



Surely the author of all created beauty must himself be the beauty in all beauty.

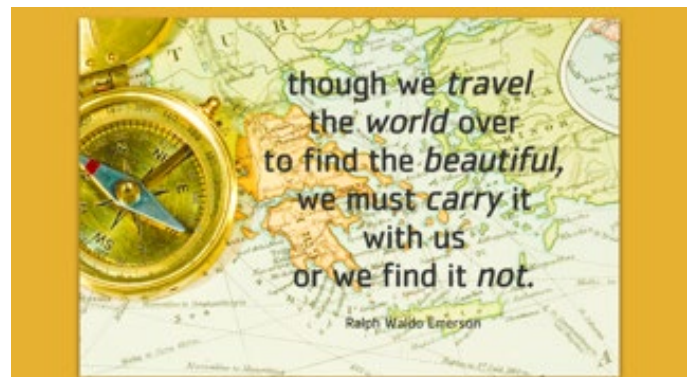
—Hilary of Poitiers

We do not want merely to see beauty ... we want to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves ... to become part of it...

—C. S. Lewis

At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in.

—C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*



O Master Lord our God, Who has honored man with Thine own image and fashioned him from a soul endowed with word and a beautiful body which serves the soul ... and hast set the head on high and endowed it with the highest senses ... and hast covered the head with hair ... and fitly joined together all his members that with them all he may give thanks unto Thee, the Supreme Artist...

He has restored the sullied image to its ancient glory, filling it with the divine beauty.

—*Orthodox Liturgy*

Blessed is the mind which, passing by all creatures, constantly rejoices in God's beauty.

—*Maximus the Confessor*

If we can manage to end up saying willingly, "Not my will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42), then everything becomes beautiful.

—*Archimandrite Vasileios, Abbot of Iveron Monastery*

You know what happens when a portrait that has been painted on a panel becomes obliterated through external stains. The artist does not throw away the panel, but the subject of the portrait has to come and sit for it again, and then the likeness is redrawn on the same material. Even so it was with the All-holy Son of God. He, the Image of the Father, came and dwelt in our midst, in order that he might renew mankind after himself.

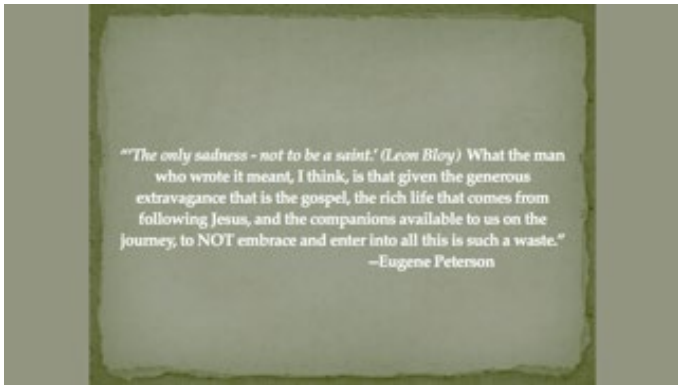
—*Athanasius, On the Incarnation*

All around us, to right and left, in front and behind, above and below, we have only to go a little beyond the frontier of sensible appearances in order to see the divine welling up and showing through... By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us, and molds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas in fact we live steeped in its burning layers. ... As Jacob said, awakening from his dream, the world, this palpable world, which we were wont to treat with the boredom and disrespect with which we habitually regard places with no sacred association for us, is in truth a holy place, and we did not know it.

—*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing to find the place where all the beauty came from.

—*C. S. Lewis*



"The only sadness - not to be a saint." (Leon Bloy) What the man who wrote it meant, I think, is that given the generous extravagance that is the gospel, the rich life that comes from following Jesus, and the companions available to us on the journey, to NOT embrace and enter into all this is such a waste."
—Eugene Peterson

For Reflection:

- For you, what would it look like to make beauty the principle of your life? In what areas of your life, or in what relationships could you display more grace and beauty?
- If salvation is the transformation of self into the beauty of God, what does that say about the progressive nature of spiritual growth? In what ways could you cooperate with God in this process?
- How could the short prayer in the final slide make a difference in the way you face your day, your job, your relationships?

*Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.
All his wonderful passion and purity;
Oh, Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine,
Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.*