

Wonder

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Title: **“Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty”** Author: **Christopher Burkett**

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We experience beauty in many ways. In nature, we may experience a beautiful sunset, the sky full of stars on a clear night, the silence and quiet of a snowfall in winter, the burst of fresh new leaves on the trees in spring, the wind and waves and salty fragrance of the ocean, the quiet depth of a forest glade, or the austere strength of a sandy and hot desert. We can also see beauty in the smile of a friend’s eyes, the laughter of children playing, the quiet murmur of an intimate conversation, and in the small kindnesses we give to each other day by day. Lives well lived. Newly born children. The list is endless. There’s the beauty of fine music expertly performed, nourishing food prepared with love, exquisitely written stories and poems, the beauty of ballet and ice skating, fine craftsmanship in construction, handmade objects of beauty and practicality, and the beauty of skills mastered and obstacles overcome. In fact, almost anything well done with care and love can be beautiful. So how can we define beauty?

Beauty is hope. Beauty gives meaning, depth and purpose to our lives. Beauty makes our heart sing, our pulse quicken, our life worth living. Beauty uplifts, beauty blesses. Beauty is the touch of heaven and the rising above this fallen world. When we speak of beauty this way, we are not describing those things which are merely pleasing to look at, but profound beauty which resonates within us and brings forth the remembrance and knowledge of God. Beauty on this level leaves us breathless, as we glimpse a hint of the divine presence which surrounds and fills all things. At those times, we see and know that beauty represents, in its most exalted form, a touch of the divine. When we experience beauty on this deep level, words fail us. Thought fails us. We have a brief, though veiled, glimpse into that world of light, power and grace that calls us to respond with wonder and praise. In those profound moments, we need no further proof and our hearts can be changed forever.

Nevertheless, while the natural world is filled with beauty, life and wonder, it still pales by comparison with the depth of beauty contained within the Orthodox Church and our church sacraments. One of the unique characteristics of the Orthodox Church is her recognition of the contribution of beauty to our spiritual life. Our homes and churches are filled with Icons and our services incorporate the use of priestly vestments, chanting and singing, processions, incense, candles, and precisely choreographed sacraments. Beauty is an integral and vital part of our Orthodox worship. This is dramatically evident during Divine Liturgy. During Liturgy, heaven and earth are united and the Saints and angels are present with us. When the chalice is brought forth, we are given Christ’s divine gift of His life. There is nothing more beautiful than this, when we truly “taste and see” and are blessed with the experience of Christ’s peace, love and humility. We then know the reality of His statement, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” At that moment, everything else fades away and we are filled with the realization that Christ’s presence within us is the ultimate consummation of beauty.

The Title Quote of this essay is from John Keats

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Discussion Questions:

Mr. Burkett suggests that beauty provides a foundation for our lives. In what way have we personally experienced profound beauty? How does this shape our world-view?

The author says that when we encounter profound human beauty, often "words fail us." Is this required definition of deeply beautiful things? Does the human rational response (epitomized in speaking or writing) oppose or interface with our sensory and emotive experience of beauty? Can we harmonize our various internal responses?

Mr Burkett implies that beauty has its source in the Divine. While Christians would certainly agree with this, how do we come to arrive at this belief? How can we account for the fact that, when non-believers see truly beautiful things, they do not necessarily see that beauty as pointing towards Christ?

How do we allow the beauty of the Church to enter into our lives? What effect does it have on us, and how can we use beauty for spiritual growth?