

SESSION 6 – Introduction to Art and Architecture in the Liturgy

I. Sacraments and Sacramentals – A Foundation for Catholic Art and Architecture:

- CCC 1131: “The **sacraments** are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us.”
- CCC 1667: **Sacramentals** are “sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy.”
- While we are aware of *the seven Sacraments*; the *meaning of “sacrament” and “sacramental”* can be applied to other visible things that communicate invisible realities.
- Our church buildings and sacred furnishes ought to evoke sense of God’s dwelling (heaven.)

II. What is beauty and is it something “in the eye of the beholder?”

--Some initial terms and principles:

- *Aesthetics*: “to perceive with the senses.” This does not simply refer to the attractiveness or “prettiness” of a thing. Rather, the term refers more to the activity of a person perceiving what is attractive and beautiful.
- *Beauty*: “the radiance of being in all of its transcendental aspects together.” Said another way, beauty is the revealing of the perfection of that which is called beautiful.

--In the consideration of sacraments as “visible signs that communicate invisible realities,” the beauty of the sacraments is achieved when that which meant to visibly present God on earth most properly attains to the goal of God being known “just as He is” (in heaven, in all his splendor and perfections).

--St. Thomas Aquinas – “Things are called beautiful upon being seen.” (Summa Theologica, I, q.5, a.4, ad1.) Beauty is the perfection of being. In order to be judged “beautiful,” the following constituent elements:

- *Integritas* – Integrity: Does the thing contain all that it ought to contain to be what it is?
- *Consonantia* – Proportion: Both in its physical dimensions and in its being in “proportion” to its proper goal.
- *Claritas* – Clarity: Does it convey what it is meant to convey?

--(For reflection: Who is more beautiful, the super model or the saint?)

III. Why ought churches and religious art be “beautiful?”

- Churches are “sacramental,” in that they are visible signs of what is invisible (God’s eternal dwelling, also known as “heaven.”)
- Churches serve functions of communion with God – and as an earthly encounter with heaven and all that heaven is:
 - Primarily in the liturgy – as the work of Christ on behalf of the people, that glorifies God and sanctifies the people.
 - Secondarily in individual devotion.
 - Always as a proper way to be in close connection to God.
- The nature of the liturgy itself (which uses signs and symbols to communicate God’s saving work) demands such.
- The beauty of the church is an expression of our response to God’s work on our behalf.
- The goal: to convey *something* of the perfect beauty of God in his eternity (in heaven.)
- **Therefore: it is the liturgy that dictates the art and architecture.**

IV. What does Vatican II offer?

--Chapter Seven of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, speaks of “Sacred Art and Sacred Furnishings:”

- SC 122—The arts are meant to show the infinite beauty of God, and thus works of art are to be “beautiful.” Principles for such beauty include:
- 123—Church is open to styles from all places and times.

- 124—Church buildings are to be “suitable for the celebration of liturgical service and for the active participation of the faithful,” without expressing anything “repugnant” to the faith.
- 125—Sacred Images should be placed in church buildings with a proper ordering.
- 126-127—Speaks regarding persons involved in art and architecture, according to their knowledge and ability.
- 128—Call for revision of laws regarding sacred art and architecture, mindful of the building itself and furnishings necessary for the liturgy.

--Keep in mind: These principles are most properly read in continuity with that which came before Vatican II. Thus, that which might be called “pre-Vatican II” architecture is never disallowed.

V. WHY ARE THERE SO MANY “UGLY” CHURCHES? Applying principles within current documents.

--In a word: **MODERNISM.**

--USCCB: “**Environment and Art in Catholic Worship,**” 1978 – **Modernist approach.**

- Predicated on liturgy as “work of the people,” this document is the source for many of the recent church buildings. Thus, the cliché “that doesn’t look like a church” has reason for existence.
- Troubling conclusion of the document: “When the Christian community gathers to celebrate its faith and vision, it gathers to celebrate what is most personally theirs and most nobly human and truly Church. The actions of the assembly witness the great deeds God has done; they confirm an age-old covenant. With such vision and depth of the assembly can the environment be anything less than a vehicle to meet the Lord and to encounter one another? The challenge of our environment is the final challenge of Christ: We must make ready until he returns in glory.”

--USCCB: “**Built of Living Stones,**” 2000.

- #9--Entirely new document that “builds replaces *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* and addresses the needs of the next generation of parishes engaged in building or renovating churches.”
- 11—“The document begins with a theological reflection on the liturgy and liturgical art and architecture.”
- 27-45—section entitled “Liturgical Principles for Building or Renovation Churches” gives the following principles:
 - The church building is designed in harmony with church laws and serves the needs of the liturgy.
 - The church building fosters participation in the liturgy.
 - The design of the church building reflects the various roles of the participants.
 - The church building respects the culture of every time and place.
 - The church building should be “beautiful.”
- Overall, this document gives greater clarity in its principles for art and architecture, without insisting on one particular style as favored by the Church.

VI. St. Benedict’s Church - Example of 20th century “Liturgical Movement” architecture.

VII. Particular concerns

- Common Objections: We should not build ornate churches because:
- How is the church “oriented:”
 - God centered (vertical) or people centered (horizontal)?
 - Where does the altar and tabernacle go?
 - To the East (literally – or only symbolically).

VIII. Where are we headed?

-- Pope Benedict XVI: in Apostolic Exhortation On the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, February 22, 2007: #35: “Liturgy is inherently linked to beauty: it is *veritatis splendor*. This is no mere aestheticism, but the concrete way in which the truth of God’s love in Christ encounters us, attracts us and delights us, enabling us to emerge from ourselves and drawing us toward our true vocation, which is love. The beauty of the liturgy is part of [the Paschal Mystery]; it is a sublime expression of God’s glory and, in a certain sense, a glimpse of heaven on earth. 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.”