

*The Good, the Beautiful and the True*  
*Homily for April 21-22, 2018*

It was last July that I saw this window in person for the first time. It was first brought to my attention in 2011. For six years I had admired it in photographs, like this one. To now be standing in Notre Dame Cathedral Paris and beholding the North Rose Window, that dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was an experience I will cherish the rest of my days. Thomas Aquinas, who was working in Paris and would have known this window when it was brand-new, said that beauty occurs at the intersection of three elements: wholeness, harmony, and radiance. We say something is beautiful— a face, a painting, a golf swing— when it hangs together as one (it has wholeness), when all of its parts work together in consonance (it has harmony), and when it shines forth as an archetype of what such a thing should be (it has radiance).<sup>1</sup>

The great wheel of the north rose window, with its myriad parts in harmonious interconnection and with the sunlight shining through it, certainly qualifies as a beautiful thing. But its beauty is in service of a higher good, for it is meant to be a foretaste of the beauty of the beatific vision. One is supposed, even while looking at it, to look beyond it and say, “Oh heavenly God.”

One of the clues of this transcendent purpose is in the window’s numeric symbolism. Around the central figures of Christ and his mother are eight small circles. Then on the next major row we find sixteen circular images and on the next twice sixteen, or thirty-two, images, and then finally another row of thirty-two. If we add thirty-two, thirty-two, sixteen, and eight, we arrive at eighty-eight. In a word, the entire window is an artistic meditation on the number eight. Then we recall that eight is a symbol of eternity, since it stands immediately outside of seven, which evokes the seven days of the week, or the completed cycle of time.

Another clue is found in the very complexity and inexhaustibility of the window’s composition. The vision of God is like that. Saint Bernard said that heaven will satisfy our thirst, but the very satisfaction will, paradoxically, make us thirsty for more. We will know all that we want to know, but that very understanding will convince us how much we don’t know. Thomas Aquinas said that what the saints in heaven grasp for the first time is just how incomprehensible God is and therefore just what an adventure the life of heaven will be.<sup>2</sup>

We will never be bored in heaven!

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<sup>1</sup> Father Barron, Robert. *Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith* (pp. 272-273). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Father Barron, Robert. *Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith* (p. 273). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

I want to use this wonderful window to describe what the Catholic Tradition calls the Three Transcendent Values, values that can be described by synonyms for the words wholeness, harmony and radiance. Wholeness is equal to beauty, harmony to goodness and radiance to truth. These three things, beauty, goodness and truth will never die because they transcend our lives in the way the light of the sun transcends this great window and brings it to life.

The same thing is true for us when we understand the significance of the good, the beautiful and the true our lives, both as individuals and as a Parish Family. We can exude a radiance pointing beyond ourselves to God, like the North Rose Window.

The Catholic Philosopher Peter Kreeft writes of these three transcendent values this way.

*These are the three things we all need, and need absolutely, and know we need, and know we need absolutely. Our minds want not only some truth but all truth, without limit. Our wills want not only some good but all good, without limit. Our desires, imaginations, feelings or hearts want not just some beauty, but all beauty, without limit.*

*For these are the only three things that we never get bored with, and never will, for all eternity, because they are three attributes of God, and therefore all God's creation: three transcendental or absolutely universal properties of all reality. All that exists is true, the proper object of the mind. All that exists is good, the proper object of the will. All that exists is beautiful, the proper object of the heart. We are head, hands, and heart. We respond to truth, goodness and beauty.<sup>3</sup>*

With our heads we can appropriate the true. With our hands we can enact the good. With our hearts we can appreciate the beautiful. See how these three transcendental properties are at play in our readings for today.

In Acts St. Peter refers to the good deed he and St. John had exercised in healing a man who had been paralysed. In the reading from St. John we are told that when we see Jesus we will be like him. What will be more beautiful than that? In the Gospel Jesus celebrates that he is the Good Shepherd and that he both knows his sheep and his sheep know him. This is the greatest expression of the Truth. To be known by Jesus and to know Jesus.

The Church is fully alive and able to radiate the Glory of God when the good, the beautiful and the true are operative. Think of how within our Catholic tradition there has always been such an emphasis on corporal and spiritual works of mercy; that is doing good as expressed by the Sisters of Charity. **The Corporal Works of Mercy** are these kind acts by which we help our neighbors with their material and physical needs. feed the hungry; shelter the homeless; clothe the naked; visit the sick and imprisoned; bury the dead; give alms to the poor.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/august2015p23.htm>

Consider how the Church has through the centuries been a benefactor for the arts, so that beauty can be expressed, in masterpieces like the Sistine Chapel and the North Rose Window. Think of how the Church has through the centuries been committed to the exploration of the truth, be it in theology, philosophy or science. Let me say something about the third avenue of truth. Did you know for instance that the earliest most sophisticated advance technology telescope was sponsored by the Vatican and is stationed at the Vatican observatory in Mount Graham Arizona? Did you know that Fr. Georges Lemaitre, who earned a PhD from MIT was the first physicist to postulate the Big Bang Theory in 1927?<sup>4</sup>

Here at St. Peter's we take seriously the importance of the good, the beautiful and the true. This is why we are so committed to ministries of mercy, like our extensive pastoral care programme and the work of St. Vincent de Paul. Here is work for the hands. We also take to heart the importance of the beautiful. Everything that has been done with the renovations is to not only make St. Peter's more functional but also to express the message that we are an inviting community where the grounds and the building point to the beauty of God and so touch hearts. And thirdly, the truth matters to us as well. It is for this reason that we have invested so much into our on-line ministry and have sponsored events like the Shroud Exhibit and take seriously adult catechesis and evangelization.

St. Peter's exists to shine with beauty, goodness and truth, like the Rose Window. In so doing we not only give glory to God but provide an inviting community where people can discover that Jesus Christ is indeed the Good Shepherd who laid down His life. The one life that is perfectly good, beautiful and true so that with our hands, hearts and minds we may share in His life.

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDz9rFVtzaQ>