TASTE Reflection Questions #4
October 10, 2019

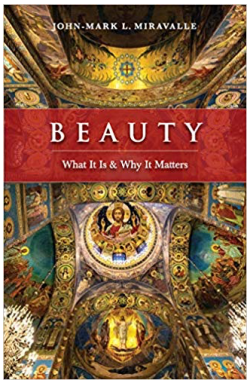
Beauty and the Joy of the Catholic Life

John-Mark Miravalle

www.tasteprogram.com

1. What point or points do you want to remember from this talk as your main takeaway?

2. Why is beauty not just a matter of opinion?



3. Did anything about the talk surprise you or provide you with new information?

4. Looking back, can you share a personal example (without violating confidences) that illustrates a main theme of this talk?

5. Looking forward …
   How can you integrate what you learned from this talk into your current faith life —or—
   How might you "***break the conventions; keep the commandments"*** to live a beautiful life
   (see last paragraph on the back page)

True Beauty Uniquely Shining Through

https://divinemercy.life/2019/08/30/reflection-242-true-beauty-uniquely-shining-through/

It's been said that "***beauty***" is in the eye of the beholder. In other words, some say that the definition of beauty depends upon the subjective preference of one person or another. Though there may be some truth to this on a more superficial level, on a deeper level ***true beauty*** comes from God and is objective in every way. It's not dependent upon our personal preference; rather, it depends upon God. The more something or someone resembles God and His Mercy, the more beautiful it is. This is important to know in regard to our souls.

We all want to be perceived as "beautiful" by others. But we must also understand that this is only possible through a life of holiness. And what's amazing is that the beauty of each person is unique. In Heaven, we will not all be the same; rather, the uniqueness of ***each person will shine forth the radiance of God in a special way***, unique only to that person. Seek to allow the beauty and splendor of God to shine forth through your life so that you will be an instrument of His glory (See Saint Faustina Diary #1251).

Do you desire to be beautiful? Perhaps this is a question more easily answered by women than men, since it is a word more common to women. But reflect upon the question. As you do, try to look at beauty from a different perspective. On the deepest level, it's not a natural physical attractiveness. ***True beauty is a sharing in the glory of God and allowing that glory to shine through your soul*** as light shines through a prism. Seek to let God shine through you so that the beauty of God will bless others with His Mercy in a unique and profound way.

What Is Beauty and Why Do We Need It?

By John-Mark Miravalle — June 11th, 2019 — Revised to fit from the following URL:
https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2019/06/beauty-john-mark-miravalle.html

Beauty demands that we celebrate order with creativity, surprise, and freshness. We are meant to be startled by the goodness of reality, astonished by things working the way they're supposed to, and delighted by the truth. Let us suppose there is such a thing as objective beauty. Suppose that the human person is made for beauty. Now suppose further that beauty is a kind of composite of two parts, one metaphysical (Order) and the other psychological (Surprise). If such were the case, the well-being of all humanity would depend on keeping these two aspects of beauty together.

I propose that beauty is indispensable to the fulfillment of all of us, and beauty is made up of two parts. ***Order*** is the metaphysical part of beauty. It is expressed as regularity, symmetry, perfection, integrity, and proportion. It occurs when a thing is and acts in accord with its own nature. ***Surprise*** is the psychological part of beauty, and is expressed as newness, freshness, marvelousness, and brilliance. Surprise happens when the attention of the human mind is arrested by something it does not find obvious. Put these two parts together, & you have an aesthetic experience. You are startled by the goodness of reality, astonished by things working as they're supposed to, & delighted by the truth.

But order and surprise are a very difficult combination to achieve. If something is orderly, it grows predictable, & becomes familiar and unsurprising. One may think the only way to effect surprise is to deviate from the natural order of things. You might think monotony is the price you pay for normalcy. Not true. The reason we can always be surprised is because things are too rich for us ever to comprehend them fully—all things were conceived by the infinite mind of the Creator, and the depths of His brilliance in making things can't be fully appreciated or exhausted by finite intelligence. Nonetheless, many will think they need to pick one or the other. This disastrous alternative gives rise to the two substitutes for beauty, namely, surprise divorced from order (which is ***disorder***) and order divorced from surprise (which we'll call ***banality***).

Rather than working to perceive deeper levels of order, many escape from boredom by going against the nature of things. Our fallen humanity has a strong attraction to the twisted, the perverse, and the disfigured. Think of the many people who watch horror movies or the many people who used to pay money to see "circus freaks". When surprise becomes the only goal, it instantly turns into perversion. When resources designed for beauty are used to simply shock, then we no longer celebrate reality—we attack it. Alternatively, many pursue order without surprise. This alternative offers a guarantee of security and a warrantee of truth, goodness, and reality—but is boring, stale, unoriginal, and dull.

The image of a white picket fence has become a symbol for family wholesomeness, respectability, responsibility, and financial stability. Yet, it has become a cliché because it suggests a life that's standardized, not exciting or interesting. Alternatively, the chain-link fence does nothing but function as a barrier. It's cold, harsh, and ugly. While it does what it's supposed to do, it has no interest in wonder or delight. The great danger of banality and of being cliché. Clichés hide the goodness and delightfulness of reality. It covers reality in a fog and makes it seem indistinct, grey, and homogenous.

Banality occurs through a ***careless use of established expressive forms***. Its overuse is killing the white picket fence. Our treasures of insights, traditions, and artistic techniques/conventions need to be used thoughtfully or they lose their splendor. If you're doing your best to communicate a truth, it doesn't matter if the formula is an old one—there is no cliché. But if you're not doing your best to communicate something worthwhile, if you're just grabbing the nearest platitude or stock image so you can have something safe to say, then it doesn't matter how venerable or valid the form of expression is in its own right, you've made it a cliché. That's an attack on beauty. We must watch how you use expressive forms, and make sure they manifest, and not diminish, the splendor of reality.

Banality also happens through an ***overemphasis on efficiency***. Roger Scruton describes this opponent of beauty as the "cult of utility." It occurs when everything is governed by achieving a material goal with as little expenditure of effort, time, and resources as possible. This is the chain-link fence: keep people in, others out, and do it fast, cheap, & reliably. When efficiency is in charge, the only form order takes is monotony, mass production, and automation. The cult of utility dismisses beauty in favor of the useful. It manufactures cars that all look the same, builds big houses with identical structures, prepares enormous amounts of lousy food, prepackages it, & sells it cheaply & in bulk. It offers high-powered jobs with large incomes designed to maximize stockholder wealth, but not necessarily to make the world a better place.

Why do we go along with this craziness? Because it's more profitable, more cost-effective, and quicker. In other words, it's more convenient. It demands less of us. It would take much more time, effort, and self-sacrifice to produce things of beauty. We need to choose between a consumerist lifestyle and a life of beauty. We can't have both. Beauty will require sacrifice. But the alternative is banality and boredom, punctuated by guilty pleasures in the disordered.

Let me conclude with a formula for living beautifully taken from G.K. Chesterton's magnificent little novel Manalive. There we are given the principle: ***break the conventions; keep the commandments***. Keeping the commandments ensures that we will have an ordered life, a life suited to our form and our natures and that our activity will be proportionate to our humanity. Breaking the conventions means we won't live according to the world's standards and that we won't get sucked into the paralyzing morass of vanity, cliché, competition, and empty social pressures which lead to uniformity without community. That's a good life. That's a delightful life. That's a beautiful life.