

The Most Beautiful

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“I asked of you a gift: look upon artists, who contemplate you daily, with the eyes of a mother, and satisfy the world’s thirst for beauty. Send great artists, but shape them with great souls, that with their splendor they may set others off on the path toward the most beautiful of the children of men: your own sweet Jesus” (*Essential Writings*, p. 310).

Those words were Chiara Lubich’s spontaneous prayer as she was spellbound by the beauty of Michelangelo’s statue of the *Pietà*, the Woman, full of Life, who holds in her arms the lifeless God-Man. Indeed, that life had been totally given to Mary so that she could generate Him once again to life in a completely new way, one that is communitarian.

I often find myself reading the above-quoted prayer of Chiara. Many years ago I posted it on a wall of my room. I consider that prayer to be an inspiration, a goal, an encouragement, a guideline and also a warning.

For the past few years I have been involved in dialogue sessions with persons who hold no religious convictions. We call these sessions ‘life rafts’. We read texts of charismatic persons, and then we allow their words to open our eyes to new horizons of understanding. In the ‘visions’ of those charismatic persons we try to discover added meaning for our existence. We believe that the great mystics are also great artists, and vice-versa, because they have the capacity of feeling and seeing things within self and beyond self.

We have such examples in the Founders of congregations. They contemplated Beauty where others saw only repugnance to be avoided and kept at a distance. Francis of Assisi was a person who saw beauty in the poor, Camillo de Lellis saw it in the sick and Teresa of Calcutta in the dying. They were all fascinated with some aspect of beauty and fell in love with that particular beauty.

Creative action is mystical action. I became aware of this when for the first time I tried to, or better said, I felt moved to allow music to speak within me. I could play the saxophone, but for a whole year I never touched the instrument. I was a little ashamed and didn’t want anyone to know how I felt. However, if now I know how to listen to music I owe it to that period of silence. It was thanks to that exercise of listening that I managed to find music within me. Yes, because during that period I wasn’t pretending to be playing music. Instead, I played the music without emitting a sound. It was something totally different; I was playing music with my soul.

Later on I learned to play the guitar and, almost unconsciously, the music grew stronger and stronger within me. I tried to put music to some classic poems and once, during a month-long retreat I put to music Chiara Lubich’s famous declaration of love: “I have only one spouse on earth.”

In all I composed about fifty songs and even took part in concerts. Since I never actually studied music as I would have liked, I know my limits. There were moments when I put music aside. For some reason, there was a time when playing the guitar or singing was a painful exercise. Looking back, I now know there were times when I needed to discover ‘Music’, the original musical note of my existence. Above all, music had to be an expression of an ever greater love. After passing through dark periods I felt music being born again within me. I discovered new ways to love.

Creative action is mystical action, and the same is true vice-versa. They are both actions of love. Those who create and are aware of this know that their work of art has been given to them as a gift, and therefore it does not belong to them. It does not even belong to others. It belongs to humanity. It could be defined as a glimpse at reality which reveals itself and, at the same time, which escapes our gaze, in a sort of a game of love that is always new and never comes to a conclusion. Perhaps that is what beauty is all about.

Beauty is a characteristic trait of Mary, the ‘all beautiful’ who sings the *Magnificat*. Jesus cries out and Mary sings! The singing is a result of suffering-love. There needs to be an empty silent space that is prepared and willing to be filled with the voice of another.

My voice becomes the echo of another ‘Voice’, and I don’t know from where it comes and where it is going. It grows within me and becomes part of my life. I follow it and look after it. I let it go where it pleases: I lose it and then I find it again. I like it: it shines with its own light and I remain fascinated. I fall in love with it, I touch it with respect. It brings about something deep within me and makes me suffer. Finally it says to me: here I am, I’m alright and I need nothing else. I am satiated and satisfied; I feel emotional and small in front of it and yet in peace when it embraces me.

This issue of *Charisms in Unity* would like to offer some reflections about the intrinsic link that exists between beauty and discipleship of Christ who is “the most beautiful among the sons of men”. Following Jesus is not only a response to a call, a courageous act, and an offering of one’s life... it is also something ‘beautiful’. This beauty has often been expressed in the various arts, from architecture to music, and from painting to poetry. Indeed, following Jesus is definitely something ‘beautiful’.