

Column

People experience that Mystery called God in different ways. We've all heard people say, I do my worshipping on the golf green, walking in the forest, viewing a sunrise or looking over the mountains at the close of day. Perhaps you have used one or more of those lines yourself.

God's great outdoors can indeed be inspiring. My house is situated on a hill over Lake Blue Ridge. In the winter when the leaves are off the trees, I can see the sun coming up over the water. On occasion, the trees will appear to be on fire as shafts of gold and red light leap up through them to the sky. It's enough to take your breath away.

The psalmist in the Bible seems at times to have apprehended the Almighty in this way. In Psalm 8, he says, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained." He then goes on to speak of man in God's order.

Architecture can likewise lift one's eyes to God. I remember sitting alone in King's College, Cambridge, England, looking up at the fan-shaped vaulted ceiling. The building beckoned worship of the God who had given such gifts to men that such a building should be built.

Philip Kosloski, a Roman Catholic author, develops this thought that both nature and art (including architecture) can be vehicles of grace when he writes:

"In addition to the beauty of creation, the beauty of art, both religious and secular, has the capacity to lead souls into a deeper union with Christ. Similar to the beauty of the natural world, artistic creation possesses its own capacity to evoke the ineffable aspect of the mystery of God."

There is no doubt truth in Kosloski's observation. Beauty, whether drawn in the sky, painted on a canvas or enshrined in a building can create a longing, a longing for something outside of oneself. All can evoke awe, wonder, joy and even worship. But there are limits to the ecstasy we experience in these moments. Something more is needed, and that is the full disclosure of God, His purposes and His will which comes to us in Jesus Christ.

The world around us – the soaring mountains, the roaring waves of the sea, the little flower in the field, the mighty oak – opens the shutter of the mind providing a momentary intake of light. Jesus, the Son of God, meanwhile, opens the aperture full width while at the same time the shutter remains open. The entire blaze of God's glory is revealed, not for a moment, but for all eternity.

Shifting metaphors, nature and art might be thought of as signs along a road. It would be foolish indeed to pull your car over to the roadside and to continue to gaze on one of those signs. Signs are significant, but they are not the destination. So it is with nature and art.

Jesus is the destination we seek, whether we know it or not. He is the end of life's quest. St. John in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel puts it like this: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Weary seekers, turn your eyes upon Him.

O Heavenly Father, who hast filled the world with beauty; Open, we beseech thee, our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him by whom all things were made, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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