

BEAUTY IS A GOOD GIFT

“Beauty is indeed a good gift of God; but that the good may not think it a great good, God dispenses it even to the wicked.”

- Saint Augustine

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”, is a common saying; and so is the saying that, “The rain falls on the just and the unjust”. The first saying means that beauty is open for personal or subjective assessment or opinion; and the second means that God allows bad things to happen to good and bad persons – without any apparent discretion or discrimination. Let’s explore both of these sayings in light of Saint Augustine’s quote on beauty as a gift.

Most of us think that a sunny a day is beautiful, but less of us think a rainy day is; in fact, rainy days may also be called dreary days. As I write this piece, the weather has been wet and dreary; yes, a wet, winter day in January; but I don’t consider such days or weather as bad because, among other things, the “gray days” don’t last down south for that long. Give it a day or two and the sun will return.

Beauty can come in “gray days” too: the reflections made by the rain on the vegetation and the lush colors accentuated by it are one aspect of beauty; then there is the rhythmic sound of the rain – whether a trickle or a deluge – that as long as we don’t have to be out in it, it can be soothing or comforting. Yes, even the foul weather has some potential for beauty – but maybe I’m just not considering some extremes such as a blizzard in Buffalo or a hurricane further south.

While these weather patterns can be regional – with moderate weather assumed the most favorable; the fact is that when so-called bad weather comes, it does come to everyone in the region. Sure, the mass populous can *hit the road* to evade the threatening hurricane; but they still share the risk of property damage and all its consequences.

On the singular example of weather – the good and the bad – and on the fact that it affects everyone in some way, the question remains on why God allows it to hurt and even destroy property and people. Yes, the weather – as we believe is God’s domain – can be a real friend and benefit, but it can be an enemy at great costs. But before I consider this age-old and forever open question, let me return for a moment to man – both good and bad...

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Man (meaning people) measure beauty in different ways. In our modern, Western culture, the beauty of a woman can include extreme dieting to the point of eating abnormalities – even malnutrition. Advertisements of one kind or another and the fashion stages showcase these models in the fineries wrapped around bones. To some, this emaciated example of a model is beauty; but to some others, it is more the epitome of exploitation in the name of the clothing enterprise. Yes, the models may be well paid; but obviously, their eating expenses are *small change*.

Many years ago, a man told me that beauty is not what we see on the outside; but rather, it's what is displayed from the inside, out. Applied to women, where often beauty is broken down by body parts and features, his basic wisdom suggest that while a woman may be pretty, she may not be beautiful. Yes, she could have the physical features that attract men, but her personality or character may be lacking much. She could make a good "trophy" for the taking, but end-up being *a sea anchor in the middle of a nasty squall*.

Not to suggest that physical features and personality cannot coincide; but to strongly emphasize that beauty is far more than skin-deep – but goes all the way to the heart or soul of the person. Beauty needs to be assessed to the core of the individual – and not be reduced to the glamour of their clothes, hair and other features. It's just not wise to let the details be "glossed-over" by another face or body. The appraisal of beauty must consider the deeper things that capture more than the eye – but the heart as well.

It is human tendency to look at less than the heart; to glance and to see the obvious, but to overlook or bypass the heart. After all, the heart is not easily understood and, as the scriptures tell us, can be *deceitful above all things*. With the insight offered in the book of Jeremiah, can we afford to overlook the heart when weighing the beauty of one of such interest and captivity?

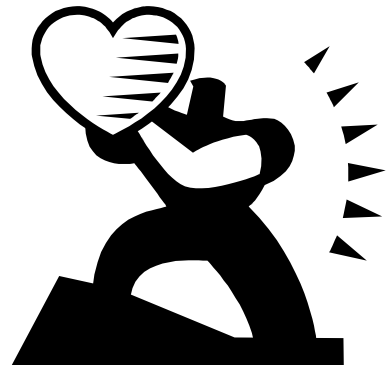
No, we should take time to look at the heart and, by careful attention, try to counterbalance our face-time with the internal things that truly count for beauty. Weighing the scales of beauty is not a momentary or instant action; it is a process that involves discernment and decision.



The heart is tender in a child; it can be easily hurt and sometimes even broken by life's tragedies and crisis. Emotional hurt can stay with a child for many years – and even a lifetime – if not treated through the supernatural working of forgiveness; and it can leave scars that, like actual physical tissue of the human body, become hard and insensitive – subject to reopen, to fester and to cause more, continual pain.

As adults, such hurt can surface or become conscious after lying dormant or "buried" for years. Left in a dormant state – whether intentional or not – is a way of not dealing with or not facing the pain of past hurts. Unresolved hurt can manifest in other ways and in other relationships; thus, the heart can truly *be deceitful above all things*. Our hearts can deceive us...and can deceive others as well.

Beauty is not limited to the good – as Saint Augustine indicates in the quote. If we consider that our conscience is a good thing – or a part of us that enables good in us – than we have God to thank. Called "common grace", God endows all people with a conscience. We cannot obviously overlook that people do bad things and, for that matter, that the heart of some people is truly bad, wicked or evil; but people do not begin life in this way, but instead, become this way as they grow and develop. Potential causes for the bad in people (or bad people) may vary; but in general, the causes are a combination of environment and personal choices.



There is nothing of beauty in bad behavior or bad people; their behavior or hearts cause hurt in others lives – due to their own anger, bitterness and despair. While they clearly cannot love others, they fundamentally do like themselves. There is no beauty in their badness; yet even so, they keep on being bad and even reward or respect those who are bad too. Whether they realize it or not, their badness is not beyond God's forgiveness and supernatural power.

God does allow badness to exist and bad people to enjoy the beauty of the earth – all his creation. God is not rewarding badness in this seemingly indiscrete distribution of beauty; but, as with common grace, makes its available out of his love for all man.

I must admit that, when trying to reason through God's providence, many questions arise; for example, why does God seemingly allow good people to encumber bad lives and, bad people, good lives, etc? You may recall that the wisest man in the world, King Solomon, pondered these types of questions (or dilemmas) in the book of Ecclesiastes. I am not sure if such questions can ever be fully answered in this lifetime – as our relationship with God is in fundamentally predicated on faith and trust that God, in his providence, has a reason or reasons.

It is impossible to know why God allows bad things to happen – since he does not like badness to begin with; but what we can consider is that beauty is still a gift from God and can be grasped and discerned through his presence in our lives. As we begin to understand God's purpose, we can more-fully appreciate the beauty that results from a sunny, a cloudy or a rainy day. Yes, we can find beauty in the heart, the weather, and all things of God; but our ability to truly see beauty begins on the beauty within us; and the beauty within us is something that God is able to do through common grace and the grace of Christ.