

Christ the King Abbey

(Traditional Benedictines)

(St Francis of Assisi Chapel)

Cullman, Alabama

Every Sunday:

6:00 AM and 10:00 AM

6:00 AM Daily

Holy Days of Obligation:

6:00 AM - 8:00 AM - 7:00 PM

Our Lady of Lourdes Chapel

Montgomery, Alabama

10:45 AM

Only on first Sunday

of each month

St Pius V Chapel

Birmingham, Alabama

9:30 AM

Every Sunday except
first Sunday of each month

TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Weekly Bulletin #908

(5th Sunday after Epiphany)

November 6, 2005 – Green

Mass of Sunday; Gl; Cr; Pref. Trinity

PRAYER AND ART

from

The Choice of God

by Dom Hubert van Zeller (1956)

The poet who is too poetic cannot produce good poetry. The same principle applies to each of the arts. If an actor is more an actor than he is a person, he not only loses sight of the individual whom he is meant to be but also fails to express true drama. The painter, the composer, the dancer: each must discover for himself the point at which, if he goes any farther, he loses touch with his essential purpose.

At once you ask, 'Do you mean his essential purpose as a man or as an artist?' The answer is 'Both.' The purpose of the artist and the purpose of the rational being are the same. The artist differs from his fellows only in his vocation to unveil the beauty which he, together with the rest of mankind, must refer back to Beauty Itself (God).

Granted that all men are intended to see in created beauty a reflection of God, and that some men see this less clearly than others, and that some do not see it at all, the vocation of the artist is in a sense an apostolate. It is for him to give sight to the blind.

The artist is the one who has always got one lens more in his telescope than the ordinary man. He sees the heavens, and must explain them to others. This, whether he knows it or not and whether he likes it or not, is his function.

If the artist collaborates with God, uniting his creative art with the creative act of God, he will be a good man and probably a good enough artist. If he refuses to work with God – that is to say if he insists on creating independently of Him whom he recognizes as Creator – then he will not be a good man, nor, in the strictest sense, a good artist. In his rebellion against the source of truth and beauty, the artist may still show great talent and even genius. But he will fail in the one thing for which his power has been given him. He will be rendering no service to truth and beauty.

The artist who knows God's purpose regarding art and defies it is like any other anarchist, any other heretic: in denying the order which is of God, he destroys the person which is himself. In trying to become more of an artist and less of a servant of God, he may become more of an individualist but he will become less of an individual. It is sad to watch promising artists deteriorate and turn out to be, in the literal sense, non-entities.

Truth is beauty and beauty is truth. This is all the artist knows and all he needs to know. If he fails truth he betrays beauty. And in that case there is no particular point in his pretending to be an artist any longer.

It is not only by expressing untruth and ugliness that an artist goes against his vocation. It is not even by expressing nothing at all, wrapping his talent in the napkin of laziness or false humility, that the artist sins. The most common failure of the artist lies in his mania for the expression of self to the exclusion of things more worth expressing.

Where the main consideration is self, what can prevent the finished work of art from being mannered? If the artist's desire rises no higher than the personal adulation he receives, or the sensation he creates, then his gift is not being used as a revelation but as an advertisement.

The straining after effect is death to true art. Cleverness, technical competence, originality: these qualities do not of themselves guarantee true art. There is all the difference in the world between artistry and art.

What the above has been leading up to is this. The religious man, no less than the artistic man, can fail in his profession by being too professional. Just as the artistic can be the enemy of art, so religiosity can be the enemy of religion. The man of prayer can all too easily be beglamoured by an *expertise* of spirituality which has nothing to do with the true service of God. The service of God is a serious business, more serious than the service of art, and to make merely a culture out of it is to go far towards making mockery of God.

Art and religion seem to have this in common, that they attract the dilettante. The engineer is not as a rule a dabbler; nor is the soldier, the historian, the explorer, the scientist. But in art and religion we tend to follow too much our own taste and impulse to the neglect of reality. (Continued on back)