

LOVE OF BEAUTY AND GOODNESS

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In my journey around the parish to bless everyone's home, I have in the last two weeks, knocked on over three hundred doors. On the day I was sojourning through the suburb of Bondi Beach, I found myself collecting sweet-smelling sprigs of basiliko and thymari from the gardens of our parishioners. I was choosing what smelled beautiful and overlooking what didn't. Thus it was, that in spreading the sanctification of Epiphany, good wishes and good cheer at the beginning of the new year, a sweet fragrance was also bestowed in each home.

This got me thinking, with only thirteen weeks before Easter, this will give me the opportunity to run a series of sermons on a concept that is very much loved in Orthodox Christianity - the concept of ***philokalia***.

Philokalia sounds similar to philosophia - philosophy - the love of wisdom. The word philokalia comes from the words *philo* and *kallos*. *Philo* means "I am a friend of." *Kallos* in the Greek language means **both** 'beautiful' and 'good'. The word combines and blends *goodness* and *beauty*. What is good is beautiful, and what is beautiful needs to be good. Something or someone that is beautiful in appearance but not good on the inside..., is not really beautiful! And so *philokalia* means 'love of the beautiful and the good.'

There is a book, brothers and sister, called the "PHILOKALIA." It is an anthology, a selection of beautiful Orthodox Christian writings from the 4th century to the 15th century. It is a guide book of Orthodox Christian Spirituality. For us Christians, what is in the Bible is the basis of our faith. And the Philokalia, of course, is based on what is said in the Bible. It complements the Bible, because it is a record of the spiritual knowledge and experience of *thousands* of years of Christian life. The Philokalia is organically linked to the Bible.

In the Book of Genesis, the creation of the world is described to us. The narrative keeps repeating ‘*God saw that it was good*’, ‘*God saw that it was good.*’ And there it is! right from the beginning... *και είδεν ότι καλόν... kalon* meaning both good and beautiful!

The novelist Dostoyevsky wrote...

“Such beauty created by God, will ultimately save the world.”

How can beauty save the world? Because God is love, and love is good; and good is beautiful... therefore what is truly beautiful is intrinsically linked to the godly and the divine.

The philosopher Nicholas Arseniev said that

*“Beauty serves...
to prepare the soul for...
encounter with God.”*

Towards the end of every Liturgy we say a prayer:

*“[Lord,]... sanctify those who love the beauty of your house”
“...αγιάσον τους αγαπώντας την ευπρέπειαν του οίκου σου.”*

In other words, we try to do everything beautifully, the church, the architecture, the vestments, the melodious chanting, the fragrant incense, the poetry, the iconography.

Why the emphasis on what some might describe as external beauty? Because external beauty should inspire *internal* beauty. Why dress nicely for church? Because it should remind us to ‘dress’ our souls nicely as well... not with *material* clothing, but with *spiritual* clothing... that is, what is virtuous, what is good, what is right.

Today’s sermon brothers and sisters was part one of a series we will run until Easter. Every Sunday, we will talk about an aspect of the Philokalia and through this series of sermons, we will come to a greater understanding of our rich spiritual heritage.

The key word to take home today is of course *philokalia*. Next week we will talk about *spirituality - pneumatikoteta*.

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