

The Way of Beauty

Session 1: Beauty and Catechesis

Speaker: Dr. Jem Sullivan

1. Dr. Sullivan tells us that “Beauty is a path to encounter God.” She elaborated that experiencing the beauty of nature is “a unique experiential path by which we encounter God in a personal way.”

How have I encountered God in the beauty of nature? How can I encourage others to encounter God in the beauty of Creation?

2. “Catechesis ... is the communication of the living mystery of God.” (Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 7)

Every form of catechesis would do well to attend to the “way of beauty” (*via pulchritudinis*) because proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendor and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties. (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 167)

How do I incorporate the way of beauty in my sharing of the faith? How can I intentionally emphasize experiences of beauty as a powerful moment of the preparation of the heart and mind to encounter Jesus?

3. Dr. Sullivan said that “beauty is the visible or audible form of truth and goodness” and that beauty reaches into the imagination and engages the whole person. Further, Dr. Sullivan said,

When we integrate the arts in catechesis we engage the whole person: first through the senses ... as the person sees or hears something that is beautiful—that draws and holds their attention. Then the experience of beauty opens his or her religious imagination to contemplate some truth or mystery of faith, and then from delighting in the beautiful he or she is led from contemplation of the mysteries of faith to adoration, to praise, to worship of God in the liturgy.

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What are some works of art, old or new, that have led me from an experience of seeing or hearing beauty to contemplation of the mysteries of the faith, to worship of God in the liturgy? How can I share this experiential catechesis with others?

4. What art adorns my places of worship (i.e., my prayer area at home, my parish or chapel, my cathedral)? In what ways are these works of art catechetical? What do they teach me? How can I share my experience with others?
5. Dr. Sullivan reminds us that catechesis today unfolds in a social context of a culture of images, a digital culture, a media-saturated culture. Further, the *Directory for Catechesis* tells us,

Digital forms of communication ... offer greater possibilities, in that they are open to interaction. This is why, along with technological knowledge, it is necessary to learn effective approaches to communication and to guarantee a *presence on the internet* that bears witness to evangelical values (214).

How do I engage this generation which is immersed in a 'digital culture'? How can I do so more effectively, so that I am intentionally open to the two-way communication encouraged by the *Directory for Catechesis*?

6. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that

Truth is beautiful in itself ... but truth can also find complementary forms of human expression, above all when it is a matter of evoking what is beyond words: the depths of the human heart, the exaltations of the soul, the mystery of God ... art is a form of practical wisdom, uniting knowledge and skill to give form to the truth of reality in a language that is accessible to sight or hearing. (CCC 2500–2501)

The process of evangelization by the way of beauty begins with seeing or hearing. Then, the subject moves from seeing or hearing to contemplation; then, from contemplation to adoration and worship of God. How can I engage in my ministry in a way that engages, as Dr. Sullivan puts it, “the whole person, not just the mind, the emotions, or the will, but the senses—

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the body, the whole person in the responsive life of faith”? How, in my ministry, can I, where appropriate, incorporate the way of beauty in the process of evangelization?

7. Through the evangelizing power of the beauty of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the evangelization of then-*Nueva España* took leaps and bounds because of how the image spoke to those who lived there.

Are there images or works of art like this today? Are there works of art that speak to the character of globalized peoples immersed in a digital culture?

For more information on Digital Language and Tools in the context of catechesis, please see the [Directory for Catechesis \(2020\)](#), paragraphs 213–217.