

- If you asked me what I thought was the most beautiful church in the world, I would have to say the Cathedral of Chartres in France. And perhaps the most famous and most beautiful element of this church is its famed stained glass windows.
- For centuries people from around the world have gone on pilgrimage to Chartres in order to view these artistic masterpieces. Not only are they aesthetically splendid, but they also teach us about the history of our faith as their artwork contains the story of salvation history.
- Bear in mind that this stained glass is not just mere window dressing, but that along with the other art and the architecture of the church, these windows create a certain atmosphere that transports those inside the cathedral to the very heights of Heaven.
- Most importantly, these windows – and indeed the entire church – are a testament to God’s power and glory and a testament to the great faith of the medieval French people.
- Last week I spoke a bit about the visible and invisible realities of our Catholic faith and how the invisible realities, the things that we cannot perceive with our physical senses but that we know by faith, are really “more real” than the visible realities of our world.
- In order to make these invisible realities visible, the Church has always relied on Her liturgy and on Her art and architecture. Embedded within our liturgies, our church architecture, and our art are signs and symbols that speak of the invisible realities of our Faith.
- So for example, our church buildings themselves are meant to symbolize Heaven. When we walk into a church, the art and architecture should, in a sense, remind us of the celestial realms and thereby lead us to contemplate God.
- Church buildings are like bridges that connect us with Heaven. Not only are they places where we go to worship God, but they should speak of the Heavenly realities to which we are all called and to which we must all aspire.
- Thus, it is so very important that church buildings be beautiful. Beauty is truth! Therefore, beauty for a church building should not be an option but should be integral to the design. Accordingly, churches should be built with an eye to proportion and symmetry, grace of design, and a verticality that draws our hearts and minds to up to God.
- Noble and worthy materials should be used in the construction of the church and its furnishings, and every effort should be made to incorporate artwork and symbolism that speak of the mysteries of our faith and help us to meditate on Heaven itself.
- Our reasoning for building churches this way is two-fold. Not only do churches connect us with Heaven by leading us to contemplate the heavenly realities of our faith, but they are also meant to give glory and honor to our Lord.
- There are some people who are of the opinion that churches should be built inexpensively so that more money can be directed toward the poor, but Scripture reveals that perhaps Jesus had a little different opinion.
- In Matthew 26:11 our Lord rebukes the disciples for complaining about the woman who anointed His feet with costly perfume, as they were saying that the perfume could have been sold for money to give to the poor.
- Jesus, however, reminds the apostles and us that we will always have the poor with us, and that we should make it a point to serve Him generously in recognition that He is our sovereign Lord. His point is that we owe Him every ounce of respect and gratitude that we can muster, even if it costs a lot of money!

- So while our own new church could have been built with less money, we have made it a point to spend a little more money in order to make it a dwelling that is truly worthy of God's holy presence. And this is a distinction that is so important for us to bear in mind.
- For us Catholics our churches are not only places that should lead us to contemplate God, but through the Eucharist they are actually places in which God dwells!
- While our Catholic art, architecture, and liturgy are suffused with beautiful symbols that speak of the invisible realities of our faith, God loves us so much that He doesn't make us rely on these symbols alone to commune with Him.
- Out of His great love for us, Jesus actually dwells with us in the Eucharist. This is a magnificent truth and an astonishing privilege that we Catholics enjoy whenever we walk into our one of our churches: that God is really and truly present in our churches.
- Jesus Christ is really and truly present in the Eucharist, as present to us as He was to His disciples 2000 years ago.
- And through the Eucharist, not only does He dwell *with* us in our churches and chapels, but He also dwells *within* us. As our Lord attests in today's Gospel: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."
- Not only can we go to be with our Lord in a Catholic church, but by receiving Holy Communion, we can take our Lord into ourselves! What can be more magnificent and yet intimate than that?
- So as we consider this incredible gift of the Eucharist, the challenge for us is not simply to conform our exterior actions to our belief in the Lord's True Presence in the Eucharist.
- In addition to treating the Eucharist with the proper respect through our personal piety, manner of dress, and reverential decorum in the church, we must also try to make our souls a worthy place to receive Him.
- Our new church is going to be absolutely beautiful, and rightly so because it will be the dwelling place of God. But if we're spending all this time, money and energy to make our church worthy for God, should we not do the same with our souls?
- My point is that it's not enough for us just to build a beautiful church. If we are going to give God the proper glory and honor He deserves, we need to be beautiful ourselves!
- And the way that we beautify our souls is through our good works, by diligently striving for virtue in all things, and most especially through our prayerful communion with the Lord.
- Holiness of life should be the goal for which we are constantly striving. And when we find that we have fallen short and committed sin, we should hasten quickly to the confessional where we can receive our Lord's tender mercy and forgiveness.
- My friends, I know that holiness can seem elusive and difficult to attain, but the witness of the saints shows us that it is possible, despite whatever weaknesses, short-comings and failures we may have in life.
- Just remember that true sanctity is not simply a matter of not sinning. It's a matter of persevering in virtue and prayer. It's a matter of humbly asking for forgiveness when necessary and relying on God's grace. It's a matter of living in faith, hope, and charity.
- In a few short weeks we will be moving into our beautiful new church that (hopefully) will lead us to meditate on the heavenly realities and be a worthy home for our Lord.
- Let us pray, my friends, that through our prayer, good works, and reliance on God's grace and mercy, our souls, too, may become beautiful and worthy homes for our Lord to dwell.