

Catechism on the Liturgy I,11

Continuing with the subject of Erudition, one reads of people who saw St. Bernadette Soubirous making the Sign of the Cross, hereby learning more about prayer than anything they heard in a sermon or read in a book. And by making the simple gesture of the Sign of the Cross, we signify at the same time a profound theology. St. Francis de Sales said in his excellent little book The Standard of the Cross:

We raise the hand first to the forehead, saying: "In the name of the Father," to signify that the Father is the first person of the Most Holy Trinity, of whom the Son is begotten and from whom the Holy Ghost proceeds. Then saying "...and the Son," the hand is lowered to the breast, to express that the Son proceeds from the Father, who sent Him down to the womb of the Virgin. Then the hand is moved from the left shoulder or side to the right, while saying: "...and of the Holy Ghost," thereby signifying that the Holy Ghost, as the third person of the Holy Trinity, proceeds from the Father and the Son, that He is the love that unites both, and that we, through His grace, partake of the fruits of the Passion. Accordingly, the Sign of the Cross is a brief declaration of our faith in the three great mysteries: namely, of our faith in the Blessed Trinity, in the Passion of Christ and in the forgiveness of sin, by which we pass from the left side of curse to the right of blessing.

No wonder St. Francis insisted on making the Sign well!

But as important as Erudition is in the gradual act of learning what is sacred, it is much to the advantage of the learner to receive a higher mode of teaching, so that he can learn sacredness even more profoundly than he did in the acquisition of good manners. Erudition has its limits, and one would hope that the Catholic attending Holy Mass was able to do more than just

fold his hands correctly, and make a good sign of the Cross. Thus a higher mode of teaching is required of us.

2. This next mode is called Formation; the second mode of the art of teaching. The word comes from the Latin *formare*, and its root is from *forma*, one of the five types of beauty which philosophers distinguish. Each of these kinds of beauty is present in Holy Mass, and each of them has something to teach us.

a. The first of these formal kinds of beauty is *splendor*, a shining forth of form indirectly visible in the matter. So when the liturgy and the things which surround it are splendid, then the one who participates in the liturgy is being taught even more profoundly than when he learned the good manners of how to behave in the presence of the King of Kings.

Abbott Suger, a medieval Benedictine Abbott who is credited with coming up with the gothic style of architecture, explained his idea that what others were doing with literature and the decorative arts, he did in the field of architecture.

As for me, concludes Suger, I confess that I took great pleasure in devoting all the costliest and most precious things I could find to the service of the administration of the Most Holy Eucharist. If, to fulfill an order from God manifested through the mouth of the Prophets, golden chalices, vases and cups were used to receive the blood of goats, calves and the red cow of the expiation, how much greater is our obligation to use, in order to receive the blood of Jesus Christ, in perpetual service and with the utmost devotion, vases of gold, gems and everything that is considered most precious. Surely neither we nor our worldly goods can suffice to serve such great mysteries.

Even if, in a new creation, our substance were changed into that of Seraphim and Cherubim, it would still be unworthy to serve the ineffable Host. We can however offer propitiation for our sins. Some, no doubt, would, in contradiction, tell us that all that is necessary is to bring to the cult a pure heart, a holy soul and true intentions; we also think that these conditions are a prime necessity and have a very special importance. But we likewise affirm that the ornamentation of the sacred vessels used for the Holy Sacrifice should possess an outer magnificence which, so far as is possible, equals our inner purity. We must serve in every way and with the utmost circumspection our Redeemer, Him from whom we receive everything without exception, and who has united His nature with ours in a Person who, placing us at His right hand, has prom-

ised us that we should truly possess His kingdom, Our Lord who lives and reigns world without end.

The good Abbott understood well the importance of splendor in the celebration of the liturgy, by insisting that splendid things be used in the liturgy.

Being formed with beauty is a great advantage to the learner, if nothing else than because beauty is one of the four Transcendentals by which we can know God. These are Existence, Goodness, Truth and Beauty. Each of them transcends this world and points us up to the next. Where you find one Transcendental, you find the others. These realities are filled with angels. Contrariwise, we find devils teeming in ugliness, falsehood, evil and destruction.