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Awakened Hearts

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:31-32)

My walk with God began one day when my dad gave me a butterfly net. My twin brother, Bruce, got one too. Together we roamed the neighborhood looking for "flutter-bys," a broad classification in our eight-year-old minds, which included both moths and butterflies. Flutterbys, we noticed, were of all colors, and their wings displayed the most intricate patterns. Finally, we captured the most astonishing of all, a *cecropia* moth. This creature won my heart.

I didn't realize it then, but my young heart was already the object of a love-quest. The lordly *cecropia*, I now see, was a Valentines card from God, who was using the patterns of its wings to draw me mysteriously to Himself. Beauty was tugging at my heart, fascinating me. Later, I majored in art, then, at age 23, I stood before the authorities of my denomination to explain why I wanted to enter seminary and prepare for Christian ministry. This beauty, I explained, could not be ignored, its quiet tug pulling me toward God.

Rom 1:20
Gen 2:9
Eccl 3:11

Beauty is a love-gift from God. He didn't have to make things beautiful, but He chose to. Why? Does an artist create art as a form of self-expression (art for art's sake)? Or does he create beauty to bless others? God was doing both. Expressing and blessing.

Ps 53

Few around me seemed to appreciate God the Artist. Most people were trying to explain that nothing I see around me has anything to do with God. The cosmos happened by mere chance, they said. A two-thousand-year discussion of natural revelation (to distinguish it from the "special revelation" of the Bible) was being bulldozed to the dump and covered over with layers of Darwinism. Yet my heart insisted on beauty, and I received heaps more Valentines cards from God. Beauty, truth and love were the ways He beckoned to my heart, quite apart from anything that happened at Church.

Heart vs Mind

Jn 14:15-17
Jn 15:26
1 Jn 5:6
Mk 8:16-17 RSV
Lk 5:21-22 RSV
Jn 8:42-47

Truth? There is a kind of truth that comes into our hearts from the Spirit of Truth. We don't analyze it but know it inside, this "ring of truth." From Augustine to William James, the greatest writers have recognized this. You kill this when you analyze it. And as for Jesus, how often He said to His disciples, "Why do you reason thus?" Jesus did not always think reasonably, because He had a different way of discernment. He consulted God. That is apparently why He went

Jn 5:19-20
Jn 7:16-19

away into the lonely places. But when He consulted God, often His conclusions seemed irrational or even weird. But: they were right.

Perhaps we overestimate our rational powers. The Catholic writer, Thomas Dubay (*The Evidential Power of Beauty*), shows how the best scientific work often grows up from this discernment of the heart, not from the analysis of the mind.

Lk 24:13-32

In those early days my heart was trying to come alive to God. I was trying to believe in God's beauty, truth and love, while my culture—public schools, scientific establishment and news media—were trying to convince me to doubt everything. God was saying: *Faith working through love is all that counts*. Everyone else was saying the opposite: "You don't need faith or love. You just need to think clearly." Something had come into our world, a matrix of deception that hides God from our eyes, while making us think that we now have all the answers. But as for me, the *cecropia* won out in the end.

Gal 5:6
Heb 11:6

Still I find around me a skeptical, secular, materialistic, loveless, beauty-defiling, pill-popping, sex-obsessed, highly addicting matrix of deceptions, and it is proving to be a disaster to the human spirit. God is calling me—calling us, perhaps—to rise above this matrix—to listen to His voice, and enter into an adventure with Him. His beauty, truth and love can warm our hearts and make life worth living again.

What is needed here is a decision to give God a try, to spend a significant piece of your day with Him, though many others around you would say it is a waste of time. You, however, have this to go on: God clearly wants it; Jesus models it out, and deep inside, you sense that you need it, if your life is going to be all it was meant to be.

Jn 15:1-17

Lk 10:42

Mk 1:35-39

Jas 4:8

Ps 27:4

Mt 6:6

You will enter that adventure like a person leaving a crowded freeway full of angry, stressed-out people who don't know where they're going, to find a place where they cannot find you. Soon you discover prayer not as a religious duty, but an adventure of discovery. God, the most fascinating person of all, is beckoning to you: "Know me." And before you're done, your adventure of discovery is likely to challenge and change everything you believe as an American in the twenty-first century.

Jer 31:33-34

Reflect:

Do you see prayer as an invitation from God to discover His beauty, truth and love? Or is there some other way you would define prayer? Is your heart alive toward God?

Further Reading:

Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*

Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Beauty*