

- One of the great blessings of my childhood was the appreciation of beauty and love for the arts that my parents – especially my father – cultivated within me.
- It was my father who taught me to see and appreciate our Lord through the beauty of this world. From my dad I learned that man *needs* beauty in order to get through life.
- I have a lot of very happy memories of gazing upon beautiful landscapes with my father while on family vacations, and of admiring magnificent works of art in the various churches, museums, and art galleries that we visited together.
- To this day I rarely see something beautiful, whether it be a beautiful sunset or a truly beautiful piece of artwork, without thinking of how much my dad would enjoy it.
- When I began studying philosophy in the seminary, I was delighted to learn that beauty, according to St. Augustine, is really just another word for God, and that the unity, truth, goodness, and beauty we find in this world all point us to God.
- The great philosophers teach us that the essence or heart of beauty is order. So in other words, if something is beautiful, it is by definition well-ordered; all of its elements form a harmonious, integrated whole.
- It is this harmony, this integrated wholeness, this order that elicits delight and peace and calms all restlessness within the one who beholds the beauty.
- I suppose this is one of the reasons why we Catholics love the saints so much. Regardless of what any of the saints looked like physically, all of them possessed a beauty of soul that radiated through their countenance.
- The saints were beautiful because their souls were well ordered. There was no division in them, no conflict between the way they lived their lives and what they knew to be true. In a saint there is harmony between his actions and his beliefs.
- If we can understand *order* as the heart, the essence of beauty, then we can understand disorder as the essence of ugliness. Ugly things lack harmony, order, and integrity. Ugliness is chaotic. Rather than peace and delight, ugliness disturbs us.
- Both beauty and ugliness can be understood in either an aesthetic or moral sense. Of course, moral ugliness is much more serious than aesthetic ugliness, just as moral beauty is superior to aesthetic beauty.
- Moral ugliness in a person indicates some amount of disorder within that person, and disorder is created within us by sin. Every sin is a disordered act because it is contrary to the great schema of order by which our Lord has created us and all of creation.
- Sin disfigures us as it disorders us, like a spiritual leprosy.
- Anyone who has ever studied nature in any depth can tell you that there is a wonderful harmony, a wonderful order to our world and all of its elements. The order that we find in creation is a sign of the larger order by which God created the entire universe.
- But God's ordering of the world is not only a physical or natural phenomenon; there is also a moral order to our world as well, which is indicated by the natural law.
- All of us have the law of God written upon our hearts. Because of this, everyone knows at his deepest core that things like stealing, telling a bold-faced lie, or murder are morally wrong.
- Just as we disrupt the natural order of the world by abusing the environment or misusing the things of this world, so too do we disrupt the natural order by acting in a

way contrary to the laws of God.

- This Wednesday we will enter once again into the holy season of Lent, which is our annual time of the year to take stock of our moral lives in order to prepare ourselves for the glory of Easter.
- If we wish to experience our own personal resurrection some day and go to Heaven, our souls must be properly ordered; they must be beautiful! – which means that we must try to correct our sins.
- To this end Holy Mother Church gives us the 3 very important spiritual practices of prayer, alms-giving, and fasting as a means of reordering our lives and our souls.
- Through the practice of prayer, we come to a greater understanding of the truths of our faith; we come to a personal knowledge of God! In coming to know God better, we come to a greater knowledge of the moral order He has set forth for us.
- Through prayer we also come to a greater knowledge of ourselves and of all of the ways that we are disordered because of our sins. It is in prayer, as well, that we are given the courage to repent of our sins and overcome them by God's grace.
- Through the practice of alms-giving we grow in generosity and give honor to our Lord, as well as help to those in need. Proper alms-giving should cost us a bit; it should involve true sacrifice, but without being imprudent.
- And through the practice of fasting, we make reparation for our sins, we find strength to say no to the temptations of sin, and we express our contrition for our sins. In some ways this spiritual practice is the most helpful in correcting our disorders.
- This is why Catholics are obliged under the pain of sin to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday; it's why we are obliged to abstain from meat on Fridays; and it is why Catholics traditionally give up something during the 40 days of Lent.
- So as we approach Ash Wednesday this week, I'd ask you to give some serious consideration to what it is you're going to give up this Lent. If you wish for your fasting to have its intended effects, you should be a bit rigorous in your fasting.
- But before deciding on what you will fast from, I encourage you to think about your sins. In what ways are you most disordered? In answering that question, try to fast from something that will really help you overcome your disorders.
- If you struggle with gluttony, fast from your favorite foods and drinks. If purity is your worst disorder, fast from the media that can be an occasion of sin for you. If you struggle with anger, fast from yelling at your kids or the other drivers on Park Road!
- Just as with alms-giving, your fasting should pinch a bit; it should cost you something. It's a bit disingenuous to fast just from chocolate or desserts if you don't really have that much of a sweet tooth or if gluttony is not a real problem for you.
- Brothers and sisters, during the Holy Season of Lent Holy Mother Church encourages us to take stock of our lives and try to remove from within ourselves all that is displeasing to our Lord, all that disorders us and makes us ugly.
- Moreover, we know as well that Christ wants to heal us, to properly order us, to make us clean. But we have to be a willing participant in this process.
- Through the tools of prayer, alms-giving, and especially fasting, may each of us bring harmony and order to our souls so that we may grow ever more beautiful in God's eyes.
- Through our commitment to our Lenten practices, may we know Christ's healing and become clean in His sight.