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Perspectives

Art invites us into the sacred

By MARGIE ADAMS

During Lent, when our prayer life takes on deep connections, mediating on the ministry and crucifixion of Christ, we can find rich inspiration through the world of sacred art.

Sacred art uplifts the spirit and creates in us a sense of awe. With vivid jewel-like canvases or gritty, harsh scenes, art draws us deeply into connection with our God. It adds to our mediations by enhancing our senses, inspiring us to think on and learn about our faith.

"By being open and attentive to finding God in all things and by engaging imaginative prayer," writes Bro. Lee Columbino, "art can draw us more deeply into our hearts and minds — and into an encounter with God."

Artists have used stained glass, mosaics, statuary, paintings — among other mediums — to glorify God and bring humanity closer to the sacred, holy, and spiritual realm. They depict themes from the Bible, especially Jesus' birth, death, and Resurrection.

Among famous paintings are masterpieces of the Good Shepherd, the Last Supper, Jesus praying in the Garden and dying on the Cross. One of the earliest visual depictions of Jesus is a painting of the healing of the paralytic, which was found on the wall of a house church in Syria; it is from 232 A.D.

During the season of Lent, it is common in some churches to meditate on the scenes depicting the Stations of the Cross. The stations were inspired by the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem. Since the Middle Ages, they have become a part of Lenten individual and communal worship. Depictions of Christ crucified draw us into the suffering and anguish he endured. We experience Christ's humanity and Divinity and are led deeper into our prayers and worship.

We come to understand the sacred and the holy through our imagination and our senses. Art helps to transform it into ways we can visualize. Through the centuries, throughout the world and among all cultures we are drawn closer to the Divine. "Let us pray for the grace to have eyes that see and ears that hear the stirrings of God's Spirit within such encounters so that we respond in love," Colombino says.

When we behold, reflect on, and pray through sacred art, we give glory to God and show our gratitude for God's gifts of skill and talent which he has generously given to us. I hope to keep my eyes open for God's artistic inspiration as I continue my journey through Lent.

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Perspectives is a regular column sponsored and written by members of the Ketchikan Ministerial Association.