

## A Meditation on Life as a Work of Art

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We are all artists.

Whether you want to be an artist or not, whether you feel like an artist or not, you are an artist. Even if you haven't painted a picture since the days of kindergarten finger-paint, even if you haven't danced a single step since your Saturday morning ballet lessons in elementary school, you are still an artist. Even if you haven't written a story since junior high creative writing assignments and haven't played a musical instrument since high school marching band or composed a song since your now abandoned late nights as an undergrad rock star wannabe, even if you have given up on all these artistic endeavors, you are still an artist.

As long as you are alive it is impossible to stop being an artist; for your life itself is your work of art. Every choice you make inscribes a sentence in your autobiography, every emotion you feel paints a brushstroke of your self-portrait, every belief and every desire sounds a note and choreographs a step in the performance of your life.

You have no choice about whether your life will be a work of art. Your only choice is whether you life will be a good work of art, whether you will live a beautiful life and cultivate a beautiful soul.

Unfortunately there are no rules for how to create something beautiful. Aesthetic achievement takes genius, an understanding of your own unique relation to the world. This, of course, does not mean that anything goes. There are clear paradigms of beautiful lives and obvious examples of unspeakable deformities. The problem is that in the art of life, as in any art, there is no mathematical formula for success. Creating beauty takes good taste, an ability to discriminate the relevant details of your life and your world and a sensitivity to the harmonies and dissonances that reverberate from your choices.

And yet, in life as in the other arts, we can develop good taste. We learn first to discern and then to love the good by contemplating the paradigmatic works of beauty available to us in our tradition, the masterpieces lived by the saints and martyrs. And we learn in conversation with our contemporary community of fellow artists how to read and interpret these great models of the past by engaging together in a study of the great critics of the past, the master philosophers and theologians, applying the lessons of the classics to our own ever-changing situations.

For Christians, the primary workshop for our training as artists is worship, the regular participation in word and sacrament. Christians believe that in worship we tell God's story, enact the drama of salvation, and rehearse our steps in the eternal perichoretic dance of the ultimate Reality. In worship we encounter the ground of true Beauty and our lives are sculpted anew into His image and likeness. In worship we are taught how to think and feel and desire, how to

represent Christ in our lives the way Christ represented God in his own life. In worship our souls are made beautiful.

But even if you are not a Christian, you are still an artist. Your life is still formed in response to traditions and models you take to be authoritative. We are all artists. May God grant us the grace to live artistically.