

GLIMPSE

Forty-Love

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There is the ongoing discussion about how art imitates life or whether art exposes to the living what life is or can be. The different forms of art's beauty are how it extends, as far as is possible, the strengths of the medium. I went to a concert last night and the person playing the piano amazed me with how her fingers could stretch from way up there to way down there and so quickly and for so long and always hitting the right keys, both black and white. I figured there must be some impossible finger/hand/arm movement toward which pianists strive.

There were also four men-singers whose voices ranged somewhere up near the ceiling and who could hold notes expressive of huge lung capacity. It was another experience of what some people can do with the same human structure which I have in a more limited manner. My voice is loud and clear and can rise to the top of the ceiling of my shower in the morning. My fingers are typing without much stretching, just so I don't have to type anything on the number row.

Athletics are another area of what can be done artistically. Take tennis for example. The ball is a certain size, the racket just so and there are base and side lines and a net stretched across the court at a specific height. All these dimensions, restrictions really, are set up for the players to see what they can do with their skill meeting these limitations. Apparently, the more the restrictions, the more beauty is revealed. If the ball were larger, the rackets wider, the net taken down and a larger court provided, would more people play? The same is with basketball where the confines become the frame for the artistry of the players. It all has to do with strengths confronting limitations.

The art-life, the human-art, the sacred-game are all about the beauty of doing something with our limitations, yes, but with our deep desires for the unlimited. St. Thomas Aquinas writings about sloth reverse sloth from being lazy, to being a state of inferiority about ones limitations. This inferiority reduces the slothful person to not trying lest those imitations be noticed by others.

All of our skills, abilities, strengths are partial and we long to be like the Infinite. In this we follow Adam desiring the apple of it-all. Adam wanted his own perfect beauty experienced through no limitations. He desired to play in his garden with no sidelines. He would have been all powerful, but not beautiful.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, it is said, but usually not in the demanding eye of the holder of the little racket of our own human abilities and skills. You might perceive my beauty in doing this or that, but your view is from a distance. My view is close-up and my self-expectations have no ceilings. The artistry then is not the slothy retirement or the power-driven anger of Adam. Our human beauty is expressed and experienced within the context of what we do with what we've been given. We admire the achievements of others as they deal with their rackets and nets. We do not exactly admire our own attempts. Peace and beauty have common roots in our being grateful enough to play, sing, dance and showing up for revealing the beauty of the First Artist.

It is only a glimpse. We don't play at life, we show up without showing off. Rather we keep showing up for the game, the concert, the boundaries within the desires for the boundless.