

The Way of Beauty

A Process of Personal Development in Faith and Creativity

The Way of Beauty is a program of personal development that cultivates the capacity to apprehend beauty and fosters personal creativity. It contains the essential features of the formation that would have been given to great artists in the Western tradition. The activities are consistent with faith in God and with the understanding that God is the source of our inspiration, so that, in our creative work, we look beyond ourselves. This is not so much ‘self-expression’ as inspired creativity, arising from a Christian understanding of the human person.

The Scala Foundation (www.scalafoundation.org) has experience in practicing and implementing all of these elements and can help you directly, but we invite you, if you wish, to follow your own vision for implementing these principles.

Do I need to be Christian?

A Christian will be very comfortable with this program, but a Christian faith is not necessary in order to benefit from it. All that is required is an openness to the possibility that there is a God, and a willingness to act as though He exists and wants us to be creative and inspired. The activities are habits of faith and creativity that can remain with someone for a lifetime.

The Process

The elements of the process are as follows:

Habits of faith. Pray first thing in the morning and last thing at night, and learn meditation in the Western tradition, for example, ‘counting your blessings’ by writing a gratitude list. This can take as little as three minutes a day in total.

Praying the psalms. The psalms are spiritually and psychologically nourishing, and are the way to ‘pray the Bible’ par excellence, as a complement to Sunday worship. They are full of vivid imagery that stimulates the spiritual imagination, and they have formed and informed Western culture for centuries, especially when chanted.

A habit of service. A regular, perhaps weekly, commitment to voluntary service. Volunteer to serve your community in any way, in order to develop the habit of self-sacrifice.

A habit of creativity. A regular, perhaps weekly, commitment to an activity in which beauty is the end, and in which we create it with care and with a skill that we learn. This is not just for the artistically gifted; anything that brings some pleasure in the doing will serve: gardening, art classes, music, embroidery. This habit stimulates the faculty of co-creating with God, an inspired creativity, which can then inform the talents a person does have, in any human activity.

The study of beauty. Developing an appreciation for the beauty of nature and of the great works of mankind: art, music, literature, architecture. Go out into the natural world and study it; study a canon of great works by the creative masters of the past. The deepest formation is to associate beauty with our prayer and worship, chanting the psalms beautifully and using traditional sacred images as a focus for our prayer.

Discernment of personal vocation. As appropriate to the age of the individual and their disposition in faith, undertake spiritual exercises to discern what God is calling them to do, their personal vocation. A person's creativity will flourish most in the context of their personal calling, whatever that may be, and for most people this is not artistic.

Review of conscience and confession of sins. A regular review of conscience, followed by confession of sins. Ideally, this is done in a sacramental setting, but for those who are not a member of a Church where this is available, confession to a trusted layperson is recommended as an alternative. As the Letter of St James says, "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). If we harm others, we should be ready to make amends to those whom we have harmed.

Sunday worship. For those who are Christian, we encourage them to view these activities as a complement to Sunday worship.