

The language of words is a great gift of Heaven. It was one of the Creator's eternal blessings to loosen the tongue of the first man, so that he might name all the things which the Almighty had placed in the world around him and the visions which He had put into his soul, and thus exercise his mind in playing with the abundance of names. Through words we rule the earth; through words we easily acquire all its treasure. Only the *invisible reality which hovers above us* cannot be brought down into our spirit through the power of words.

We control earthly things when we speak their names, but when we hear of God's infinite mercy or the virtues of the Saints, things which should move us to the depths of our being, our ears are filled merely with empty sound, and our spirit is not uplifted as it ought to be.

But I know of *two miraculous languages* through which the Creator has enabled men to grasp and understand heavenly things in all their power, or at least so much of them—to put it more modestly—as mortals can grasp. They enter into us by ways other than words, they move us suddenly, miraculously, seizing our entire self, penetrating into our every nerve and drop of blood. One of these miraculous languages is spoken only by God, the other is spoken by a few chosen men whom he has lovingly anointed. They are: *Nature and Art*.

Since my early youth, when I first learned about God from the ancient sacred books of our faith, *Nature* has seemed to me the fullest and clearest index to His being and character. The rustling in the trees of the forest and the rolling thunder have told me secrets about Him which I cannot put into words. A beautiful valley enclosed by bizarre rocks, a smooth-flowing river reflecting overhanging trees, a pleasant green meadow under a blue sky—all these stirred my innermost spirit more, gave me a more intense feeling of God's power and benevolence, purified and uplifted my soul more than any language of words could have done. Words, I think, are tools too earthly and crude to express the incorporeal as well as they do express material reality.

This gives me a great occasion to praise the might and kindness of our Maker. He has surrounded us human beings with an infinite number of things, each of which has its own essence and transcends our simple understanding. We do not know what is a tree, or what is a meadow, or a rock; we cannot converse with them in our language; we can communicate only with other human beings. But the Creator has put powers of sympathy with these things into the human heart that enable them to reach it in unknown ways with feelings or intimations, or whatever else one might call them, which are more effective than measured words.

The worldly-wise have gone wrong in their quest for knowledge, laudable though this quest might be in itself; they have tried to uncover the secrets of the Heavens and set them among terrestrial things, in a terrestrial light. And, insisting on their rights, they have boldly tried to

expel the *dark intimations* of these secrets from their hearts.—Is it in man's feeble power to unveil the secrets of Heaven? Does he believe himself capable of bringing boldly into the light what God covers with His hand? Can he arrogantly dismiss the obscure *feelings* which descend to him like veiled angels?—I honor them in deep humility, for it is one of God's great mercies to send us these genuine witnesses of the truth. I fold my hands and adore.

Art is a language unlike that of Nature; but Art, too, has a marvelous power over the human heart and exercises it by equally hidden means. It speaks through the image of men, which is to say that it uses hieroglyphic signs which are familiar and comprehensible to us by their appearance. But it endows these visible forms with something spiritual and supersensual in a way so affecting, so admirable that it can stir us to the roots of our being. Certain paintings of Christ's passion, of the Holy Virgin, or of the lives of the Saints have more thoroughly cleansed my soul and instilled in me more virtuous sentiments than any system of morality or spiritual meditation. Thus I remember a picture of Saint Sebastian, magnificently painted, which shows him naked, bound to a tree, with an angel who draws the arrows from his breast, while another angel brings from Heaven a wreath of flowers for his head. I owe to this painting some very penetrating and lasting Christian sentiments, and even now cannot recall it without tears.

The teachings of learned men exercise our brain, only half of our self. But the two miraculous languages whose power I proclaim touch our feelings as well as our mind; they seem to fuse—I cannot find other words to express it—all parts of our unconscious being into a new, single organ which receives and comprehends in this twofold way the miracles of Heaven. . . .

When I step from the sanctuary of our monastery into the open air, having just contemplated the crucified Christ, and the sun shining from the blue sky embraces me with its warmth and life, and the beautiful landscape of mountains, rivers, and trees charms my eyes, then I see God's own world arising before me, and feel in a very special way the emergence of great things within me. And when from the open air I return to the sanctuary and contemplate the painting of the crucified Christ with earnest piety, then I see another world of God opening before me, and feel in a different way the emergence of great things within.

Art gives us the highest human perfection. Nature, so far as the mortal eye can see, resembles a fragmentary, oracular utterance from the mouth of God. One might say, were it allowed to speak of such things, that God looks on all of Nature and the whole world as we look on a work of Art.