



THE BASILICA OF SAINT MARY

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Welcome

Art That Inspires Prayer

In the fall of 2002 I was asked by The Walker to give a Catholic tour of an exhibit entitled *Ultra-Baroque*. I accepted the invitation as I recognized the word Baroque and thought this would be an easy thing to

front of a work entitled *Milagros* or miracles. I was reminded of the Catholic custom to bring the image of a body part that is failing to a sacred place, such as a Marian shrine, and leave it there while praying for a

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do for the Catholic art historian that I am. However, when I received the catalogue of the exhibit I was surprised not to find richly decorated chalices and brocaded vestments. Rather the exhibit showed very contemporary art from South America with faint allusions to Baroque art as it was celebrated in South America some three centuries earlier.

As I visited the exhibit in preparation for my Catholic tour of this not-so-Catholic exhibit, I found myself in

miraculous cure. As I was mesmerized by this work of art, my mobile rang. It was my sister letting me know my dad had been taken to the hospital for emergency surgery. In an instant, this museum dedicated to modern art became a sacred place and I prayed for a miracle as I continued to be inspired by *Milagros*.

This contemporary work of art which was not at all intended to inspire prayer, all of a sudden did just that. The setting was not religious, the art was not

religious, at least neither intended to be religious. On the contrary, yet all of a sudden, that element which is present in all good art, namely the connection with the divine creative power, surfaced and inspired hope and courage.

Because good art indeed is born out of the artist's share in the divine creative power, art can communicate in ways that cannot be expressed in other ways. This kind of communication happens as an encounter. All of a sudden a deeper meaning is revealed. It is sort of like falling in love. All of a sudden we realize we love a person. We don't reason ourselves into falling in love. It just happens and we all of a sudden know. Art works in a similar way. It is not often reasonable and it does not explain. Rather, art reveals and it often does so in unexpected ways and



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sometimes in unexpected places, such as a contemporary art museum.

Milagros was the right piece of art, in the right location, at the right time for this sacred moment to happen. I felt strangely comforted and at peace as I prayed for the best possible outcome for my dad. Then my phone rang again. My dad had just died. Though painful for all of us, I trust that my request was granted.

OUR VISION:

Seek the well-being of the city to which I have sent you. Pray for it to the Lord. For in seeking its well-being, you shall find your own.

— Jeremiah 29:7