

Angelico Project Gala, June 13, 2024

Wow! I'm delighted. Thank you for this award. I cannot honestly receive this honor without acknowledging that it not just for me, but for all of you in this room. We are doing this together and need each other in the vinyard.

My first word is one of gratitude.

It is my joy to be here to celebrate the work that God is doing through the Angelico Project, and my work.

I have often been asked about my spiritual journey.

There was a time many years ago that I was not going to church. As St. Augustine described himself, I was mostly restless and confused. Then I set out to complete a series of works based on Ignatius Loyola, for Xavier University, my alma mater. In preparation for the works, I completed the Spiritual Exercises with the late Br. Daryl Burns, who was my spiritual director.

It changed my life.

The Spiritual Exercises teach us how to pray creatively with our imagination. Like our Patron, Blessed Fra Angelico, painting and praying became one thing.

One of the fruits of the Exercises was gaining eyes to see God at work, surprisingly- even in the small things of my daily life.

This awareness is captured well in a poem I later came across by a Medieval poet, Hafiz. Specifically, this line opened my heart with a joyful new perspective:

**Today -
The vegetables would like to be cut
By someone who is singing God's name.**

The same can be said for my brushes who want to be held by someone singing God's name. My paints wish to express gratitude for creation, and my blank canvases are hoping to become a form of high praise.

St. John Paul II said, "Not all are called to be artists in the specific sense of the term. Yet, as Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of creating their own life; in a certain sense, they are to make it a work of art, a masterpiece."

I have been blessed to be surrounded by men and women who are creating masterpieces of their lives.

I'd be here all night if I named everyone for whom my heart overflows with love and gratitude.

As many of you know, I would not be standing here if were not for my husband, Greg Wilson. He sees his task as having things run smoothly and holding it all together. You have no idea of what he has to go through. Artists are not known for practical matters. The other day, I was running late and forgot my phone. I hurried into the kitchen , grabbed it, and ran back to the car. Pulled it out of my purse later to find that I had grabbed the TV remote.

My family is here. Including my mom and also my brother in law who flew in from Delaware.

I see many friends who have picked me up off the floor, and likely will do so again. You support me , encourage me, and also have given patronage for my art.

Priests. How can we ever thank you enough? You have given up your lives for us to receive Our Lord in the Eucharist, and minister to us the sacraments.

My heart is especially grateful to those of you who are here.

Your presence shows your commitment to the arts. I believe God chose you to be here to encourage you to continue with beautification as a powerful form of evangelization.

Great Catholic theologians say beauty is the first place to start in sharing the

Good News because it allures us into a different spiritual space. Your commitment to beauty allows the truth of our faith to pierce the culture around usas Bishop Barron said, “like an arrowhead.”

It is certainly the path which gave me, a deeply flawed artist, access to God.

The Council of Trent enjoined artists to bring people back to the Catholic Church. Caravaggio, a counter-reformation artist, was not the perfect Catholic, we know about him through his police records.

But his art and other artists of that era brought people back into the fold. Art served the church then, as it can now.

I don't claim to be the next Caravaggio. I still remember seeing his self portrait at 17 in the Galleria Borghese Museum in Rome. Blown away. Intimidated. I wanted to throw away my brushes and call it quits.

But I learned to switch my focus on God rather than my limited self, and I am convinced that God puts a brush in my hand to do something for souls, and for His glory.

I pray that the next chapter of our church history is written about how we attract the hearts of the faithful.

There is beautiful art in the gallery. I hope you take a moment to gaze at them. My works are intentionally unfinished to demonstrate a point.

Bl. Fra Angelico, Caravaggio, and the other artists started this creative form of evangelization WITH THE SUPPORT OF GREAT PEOPLE WHO BELIEVED IN BEAUTY, but their work is not finished. It is our turn now to continue what they began.

When I work intensely on a painting, I start to lose the ability to see it. I need to flip the canvas upside down or see it's reflection in the mirror for a new perspective. Sure, there is great division in our world AND church today. Which is not good. But the opposite statement is just as true.

Things ARE good. Where sin abounds, Grace abounds all the more. We often just need a change of perspective, and art can give us that.

These are exciting times!

The new movement has already begun, here, in this region. Did you notice the fire of the Spirit when Brad described the mission of the Angelico Project? I did. The same Spirit that created the universe with love will always overpower any other force.

And we can trust in that Spirit - pouring out His graces upon us tonight.

Our singular courage and our strength is in the Lord.

Friends, listen.

There are many blank canvases waiting to draw us into a higher realm, stories to be told, and songs to be sung which will bring light in a dark world.

Souls want to get lost in beauty and encounter Christ in a new world.

St. Ignatius taught us, "All for the Greater Glory of God."

"ALL..... for the Greater Glory of God."

And that, Ladies and Gentleman, is what art is ALL ABOUT.

I invite us now to offer all of this to God and pray the Glory Be.

Blessed Fra Angelico- pray for us.

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[Pause]

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