***Laudate Dominum, K 339*, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

When I first got to Lima, Peru, I was struck by the ugliness of the place. There was never ending traffic, trash and dog poop everywhere, smog in the sky, shacks and dilapidated buildings, and people crammed in like sardines. The smell was a mixture of wild dog urine, car exhaust, dead fish, and sea algae. The noise was constant and obnoxious--loud music, cars with bad mufflers and horns beeping, people yelling, and construction. This struck me, because it was so far from any concept of beauty that I had ever known.

That would soon change, and my perception would dramatically alter after I noticed the real beauty of the place. I was there to work, and work hard. I was there for no other reason than to hear the voice of God by helping the poor in the grittiest of circumstances. In these circumstances, I met the most beautiful people.

I also found intense beauty in the “contrasts” and “irony” all around me there. This was a place at once dirty and “developing” and clean and transforming. The people want a better life. They have this desire. The striking thing about humanity, is that these two opposite things can exist at the same time in the same place. I saw shanty towns butted right up against the richest hotels. I saw a brand new “Home Depot” type store being built in the middle of a neighborhood full of crack houses. I saw beautiful mountain rivers filled with garbage. One of my favorite pictures I took was in the worst neighborhood--La Victoria. There was a shack made of mud bricks with bars on the windows. On the window sill, sticking out through the bars, were a pair of brand new, bright pink running shoes. These contrasts to me were so beautiful! They meant that something was changing--moving--transforming. Nothing was staying still! They were not going to remain stagnant.

The only breaks I got from work were in the afternoons after Mass. I would leave the convent (in a terrible neighborhood) to go for a run. I was very intentional about this break. I craved beauty. I would put on my ear buds to fill my head with Mozart. At first I did this to drown out the noise and give myself a chance to reflect. But then, I noticed that it totally enhanced the scenes around me. It allowed me to see everything around me as beautiful. So imagine… Listening to the piece of music you hear now---running down a broken, dirty sidewalk, avoiding dog poop, past the busy market that smells like dead fish, and across one of the busiest streets in Lima. Finding nothing but joy and beauty!

The final destination of my runs was always a park that was in the next neighborhood. Paradise! My green and bright, flowery reward! Smiling, fully alive, and so grateful! This was my time of the day to live only for me and my God--to recognize the beauty He created… In *every* circumstance!

Listen to the music, and ask yourself:

- How distracted am I by my own busyness?
- How intentional am I about “breaks”?
- What is the most beautiful thing I have seen recently?
- Do I have trouble seeing what is beautiful?
- What is my nature as a human? A child of God?
  (Busyness? Distraction? Facebook? Peace? Beauty? Openness? Love?)