***Sinfonia in D Major*, Georg Philip Telemann**
Various Images of the Chartres Cathedral and the Willis (Sears) Tower

Take a moment to settle in. Let the music carry you as you take a good look at the images on the screen while contemplating them--their beauty, style, differences, similarities, etc.

***Small Enough to Enter the Cathedral of God*, Anthony Esolen**

> Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb
> Now leaves His well beloved imprisonment;
> There He hath made Himself, to His intent,
> Weak enough now into our world to come;
> But oh, for thee, for Him, hath the inn no room?
> — John Donne, from La Corona

Behold two tall buildings. One is an inn for God and man, and one is not.

One is what used to be called the Sears Tower, in Chicago. It's no longer called by that name, because the business in question is nearing its final dissolution, and its place already knows it no more. The tower is more than 1400 feet high. It is a titanic feat of engineering skill, and the most popular site for tourists in the city. People ride to the observation deck on top, whence they can look out upon several states and the vast waters of Lake Michigan below. The tower is gray, glossy, steely, straight-lined, unadorned, massive, and cold.

It is something made by man, but not *for man*; rather for the rich and powerful few whose offices are located in it, and for those tourists who will look not so much at it as from it. It does not elevate the ordinary. It ignores it. It may be a source of employment for many janitors and repairmen, but it cannot be an object of their devotion. No old man will say to his grandson, "Come, Billy, let's take the elevator to the ninetieth floor, so I can show you the waste-baskets I used to empty." The Sears Tower is not an ugly place. It is not really a beautiful place. It is hardly a place at all. It is more like a negation of place; it might as well be in Singapore, or Shanghai, or São Paulo, for all of its aloofness from the human world around it. It is untouched by the ordinary people's slightest whimsy or care or love. Some people might call it art. No one would dare to call it *folk art*.

Now let us look at the glorious cathedral at Chartres.

It towers "only" about 350 feet above the surrounding plains, though it can be seen for many miles. And certainly the good people of Chartres, in the thirteenth century when they were rebuilding the cathedral so that it would be one of the glories of France, were proud of its imposing height, and welcomed pilgrims who would come to their village to venerate their relics and spend some money in the great fairs held during the Marian feasts throughout the year.

But, for all that, Chartres Cathedral is a completely different kind of building. There is room for man at this inn; and the Church alone could build it Let's think about this for a while.

The boy carpenter

We know that human hands erected the metallic walls of the Sears Tower. But we only know it by inference. For all traces of the human hand have been obliterated. A machine did not build the tower, but a machine might have built it; its lines have been grooved not by a boy with a chisel, but by machines.

That was not true of Chartres, of course, because they didn't have our diesel-powered cranes and winches and pile drivers back then. But I mean more than that. Every square foot of that cathedral bears the fingerprint of man. And this is not just a matter of historical circumstances. It's of the essence of the work of art itself, of both the Lord it is meant to celebrate, and of the Christian souls who are meant to celebrate there.

Think of the many pious paintings of the boy Jesus in the home at Nazareth. There's Mary, spinning wool on the distaff, or kneading leaven into some measures of flour. There's Joseph, whose hands are skilled at the plane and the lathe, teaching the boy the art that he will use to provide for Mary during those hidden years before his ministry to the world. The hands of our Lord were thick with the calluses of work. He had the knobby knuckles and corded wrists of a man who knew the toil and the sweat, the limitations and the victories, of hard manual labor, of the art of making things from wood — the joists of a public building, the posts and lintels of a portico, a table, a cradle, a cross.

So the men who built Chartres Cathedral did more than work with their hands. They understood that the Lord had for ever exalted such lowly work as theirs. That is why they memorialized their work itself, in and upon the cathedral.

"Master Jacques," I imagine one of the masons saying to the chief of the glaziers, "we masons will contribute our share, if you could fashion a part of that window for us." And so there's a part of a stained-glass window where we see three stone cutters, apparently on some high scaffolding, building the ramparts of one of the towers. And there's another place where we see, commemorating the month of September, two men treading out the grapes in a vat, with the laden vines hanging above them. And another place where we see three men and a horse: one of them is holding the horse's head to keep him still, another is shoeing one of the horse's hind hooves, and the third, the farrier, is using a small pointed tool to trim the horse's nails.

And another place, where we see shepherds, those lowliest of men who belong to no craftsman's guild, receiving the first good tidings of the Nativity of the Lord. They will go to the stable to behold him, just as all people, shepherds, housewives, bakers, goldsmiths, knights, dukes, peasants, priests, scholars, washerwomen, fishermen, weavers, kings, and children will

come to Chartres, to worship him and to receive him under the humble guise of bread and wine. This inn welcomes everyone.

The tourist and the pilgrim

No one goes to the Sears Tower to fulfill a vow. It is the object of no one's steadfast love. It has no meaning for one's life. It is a place to visit, but no one can dwell there.

The *tourist* is by definition somebody taking a tour, going round and about to rack up "sights." I'm not saying that it is a bad thing to be a tourist. It is just not at all the same as being a *pilgrim*. The difference is well expressed in the old carol:

> Come to Bethlehem and see
> Him whose birth the angels sing!
> Come adore on bended knee
> Christ the Lord, the newborn king!

The pilgrim has set in his heart the Lord of his love. He goes to Bethlehem or Lourdes or Guadalupe or Chartres not for photographs, but for the *phos kosmou* itself, the Light of the World. The tourist may be tired of home, and would like to get away from it for a while. The pilgrim longs for his destination because it is more a home to him than his home.

The Sears Tower says to the lone man, bluntly, "We will allow you to enter, subject to certain conditions, even though you are tiny and insignificant." Chartres says to the lone pilgrim, "Come and enter into the joy of your Master! He too was small, and if we are as small as he, he has promised us this dwelling. For he said, 'I go before you, to prepare a place.'"

The essential tourist is restless because even his home is not a home to him. The pilgrim is restless, because the home he loves is but the shadow of his true home, the one toward which he is walking, day by day. Chartres says to him, "Come to me, weary wayfarer! There is not one square foot of me that has not been the object of some human being's loving and thoughtful attention. Because I am a place for God, I am a place for man."

The tourist turns the wine of the holy into the water of the secular. For the pilgrim, even a little drink of cold water along the way is like wine.

Singing in the cathedral

What is the Sears Tower for? Making money, I suppose. What else? Anything?

What is Chartres Cathedral for? We might ask that in another way. What was the womb of Mary for?

When Mary housed the Lord, *immensity cloistered* in her dear womb, she was herself the true Ark of the Covenant. Within her living chamber dwelt the New Law, the new high priest, the true bread of heaven. She thus became not only the Mother of the Head of the Church, Christ, but herself a type of the Church. The Church cannot be more or other than what Mary was — the little womb wherein we shall find the Creator of all things.

Chartres then is that warm place like the womb of Mary. It is incomparably beautiful. Its deep blue light suffuses the interior with visions of prophets and saints, of ordinary Christians at their work, and of Mary and Jesus, and the life to come. It belongs to all believers, as Mary is the Mother of all believers. It is where they are baptized when they are speechless babes, where they receive the first taste of the bread of angels, where they are married, where they sing on Christmas Day and mourn on Good Friday and rejoice on Easter morning, where their bodies lie in the coffin, as their loved ones pray for their souls. It is the one place on earth that most prepares them for their place in the sight of God. It is the womb, vast and intimate at once, where by grace they will be made small again, and be born again, born into the eternal cathedral, whose length and height and depth are the unfathomable riches of God.

What struck you about this essay?

Ask yourself: am I a tourist or a pilgrim?