At the end of John Keats’ poem Ode to a Grecian Urn we hear the line, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." Keats’, of course, was a poet of the Romantic Period, which explains his exaltation of beauty. Just for a quick review, the Romantic period emphasized the individual and personal feeling. Romantic, however, in this context does not mean writing poems for Hallmark Valentine’s Day cards, but something different. In many ways it is easiest to understand this period as a reaction against the age of enlightenment, with its mechanical world run by a clockmaker god. The enlightenment age thought of humanity as functioning best when a set of reasonable and logical rules was followed by rational beings – or put succinctly in their ideal world Mr. Spock is president. And so Keats in many ways is turning the Enlightenment world on its head when he argues that truth is not something that we reason ourselves into but is rather something that is present in beauty and beauty, as we know, is something very difficult to define by reason. The Romantics argued that there was more to us than a simple collection of mechanical laws could explain and that we could not pretend otherwise. And so beauty becomes a prime candidate to overturn the rational world order because beauty is something that appeals not to reason but to the aesthetic senses. Now I do not go as far as Keats and the Romantics but I think there is something to this, something to seeing truth in beauty. And part of my reason for taking this position is because of what is written in the Psalms, “to behold the beauty of the Lord.” God for all intents and purposes is beyond our comprehension and because of this we need to use all of the tools at our disposal to even begin to understand Him. To say that we can reason our way up to God is naïve. Certainly, there are reasonable things about God and God expects us to use our reason, but that is not everything, we have other faculties and these should be employed in the love and adoration of God. And so, on this Christ the King Sunday I want to take some time to think about not just beauty, but how God speaks to us in ways that can be hard to nail down.

To do this I want to spend a little time on what we hear from Paul in Ephesians today when he says, “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.”

The particular phrase I want to concentrate on is the phrase, “may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened.” And ask what exactly are the eyes of our heart? Obviously, unless I nodded off that day in biology, our hearts do not have eyes. And since I was lousy at biology this thankfully means that we get to move on to the classes I actually took in college, English. Hearts having eyes is a poetical device. So right out of the gate we are told, rather explicitly, that Paul is conveying something that is not fully available to our reason, because he is using poetic language. If he were using reason he would be talking about our actual eyes, the things that process actual images.

Before I go on, I want to give a little warning and the best way to explain this warning is by use of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. And before you think I have gone nuts I do have a point with this, so humor me for a moment. Briefly stated Heisenberg’s uncertainly principle comes from the field of quantum physics and basically states that the more certain we are about the position of an element the less certain we can be about its momentum and vice versa. In other words, the more knowledge you gain over one aspect the more knowledge you lose over another aspect. I bring this up as a way to warn you about the dangers of trying to explain poetic language too much. That is the more we explain it the more likely we are to lose the original meaning. Kind of like explaining a joke, in explaining it, it ceases to be funny, which is sort of the point of a joke. So, as we reflect for a moment on what the eyes of our heart are supposed to perceive know that we are going to lose some of our understanding by trying to explain it. But let’s give it a quick try.

In the Old Testament the heart was used as a way to explain that part of us that was the seat of understanding. Note it is not the seat of knowledge but of something beyond, it is a sort of deeper wisdom about the way the universe operates. Here is an example of what I mean which hopefully helps. When I was 17, I was an exchange student in Munster, Germany. As a guest of the city I was invited to a little ceremony in one of the cities governmental buildings known as the Friedenssaal. This hall was not open to the general public and so it was kind of a big deal to be allowed in there. And the reason it was such a big deal was this was the hall in which the Treaty of Westphalia was signed in 1648, ending the Thirty Years War. All of this was explained to me, but I really didn’t get it. Sure, I heard the words and understood what they meant but I did not understand the gravity and honor of what I was getting to see because I was 17 and stupid. I was given all the knowledge but I lacked the understanding. Being 17, I would have probably been more impressed if they had rolled in a sausage cart and started handing out free knackwursts. The eyes of my heart had not been opened to understanding the significance and the honor of what I was being allowed to participate in.

This is what I think Paul is asking for today. For us to be able to understand and see things for what they really are. I started off by talking about beauty and the importance that the poet Keats placed on it, but to see beauty we need to be ready for it. Think about a piece of music that might bring someone to tears and bore another person. The person that has been brought to tears is seeing with the eyes of their heart, they are seeing something in it that the unaware person will miss. Here is my last dumb example. When I lived in Nashville, I had a friend who really liked country music. And whenever we would go out, he would point out all the famous people we were seeing, from Chet Atkins picking up a bagel to Mindy McCready enjoying a salad. The thing is when I was not with him, I missed all of this because I simply did not know. And so, my call to us it to be aware, to awaken the eyes of our heart so that we may see the beauty and wonder of God that is all around us. This is not something we can achieve by following a recipe but rather something that will come by seeking, seeking to grow closer to God through the use of all our senses and praying that we may be his, this day and forevermore.