

Identifying Inner Beauty

Some Questions to Ask Yourself

In Myself:

- Do I dress and behave in such a way that people see me as a person they respect, or as an object they would like to possess?
- Am I aware of everything that is going into my senses?
- Do I take steps to purposefully guard against spiritual garbage that will make my interior struggles more difficult?
- Do I act in such a way that other people are led to behave in a manner that is best for their soul, or harmful to it?
- Do I keep my body physically pure from sex, harmful substances, and excessive eating and drinking? Is my body a suitably pure place for the Holy Spirit to dwell, to help me in life?
- Do I make a conscious effort each day to cultivate clean and soul-strengthening thoughts? Do I speak and act in a way which reflects this to others? Do I pray every day for other people I know and hear about who are in need?

In a Potential Spouse:

- Does this person outwardly concentrate in their words and actions on the image, looks, clothing, status, and possession of themselves, or of others?
- Is this person drawn to images that excite them, disrupting their inner stillness, and controlling the actions in their lives?
- Do they consciously try to guard their senses?
- Does the person demonstrate that they have in mind the best interest of other people? Are they unconcerned about the lasting impact of their choices, as long as they get their own satisfaction?
- Have they and do they keep their body physically pure from sex, harmful substances, and excessive eating and drinking? The best way to predict future actions is to look at past and present ones. What kind of life would you have if you were married to this person?
- Do they make a true priority of activities (such as reading, conversations, prayer, and selfless acts) which strengthen their best personal and spiritual qualities? Do they have regular spiritual counsel, and a concrete spiritual discipline for dealing with their temptations, shortcomings, and sins, now and in the future?

made it, worldly beauty will always be in a state of flux. For that reason alone, investing our time, money, and emotional energy in “preserving” or gaining physical beauty is ultimately a fruitless exercise – a mission in which we can never really succeed or be happy.

Too often, it is young men who propagate a shallow approach to beauty. Unfortunately, too many young women buy into it, for the sake of finding someone quickly and easily. Fueled by false images from the media and pornography, the notion of physical beauty as a means of self-satisfaction has truly destroyed any chance of true and fulfilling human relationships.

In order to satisfy the longing of our hearts, we must grow beyond this – beyond self-satisfaction, beyond immaturity.

Such maturity around the question of inner beauty requires real, conscious effort in a spiritual life. Like many things, we can recognize inner beauty by its fruits, by the words and actions we use in our lives. And more than this, we can take the models of the Christian women martyrs, who did not care if their breasts were cut off, or if they were disfigured for confessing their faith in Jesus Christ as God. They knew – just like we know – that our physical body will turn to dust, but will be renewed and transfigured at the final resurrection.

All Saints of North America
Orthodox Church

HAMILTON · ONTARIO · CANADA



Outer Beauty



Inner Beauty

Cultivating Beauty That Lasts

We find ourselves today in the midst of a battle over beauty – a battle between the thirst for outer beauty, and the search for lasting, inner beauty.

Many people – especially young women – find themselves caught up in a distorted search for “perfection”: the false physical perfection of the athlete or the supermodel.

God made human beings perfect, physically and spiritually. But our fallen bodies will always be imperfect: we’re going to age, to die, to get sick, and to face all the very real results of a world that fell away from communion with God.

Because the world is broken, and not as God

- CONSIDER:**
- ✓ Examine your wardrobe choices.
 - ✓ Check your use of slang and suggestive language.

The Mother of God

- CONSIDER:**
- ✓ List the things you see every day, noting what commands your attention.
 - ✓ Practice averting your glance from things that excite, anger, or attract you.

Modesty in Dress and Manner

Holy women in particular are always pictured in Orthodox icons demonstrating modesty of dress, while they display a quiet and solid strength in their lives and character. Modesty in behaviour – such as avoiding boasting and flirtation – is completely countercultural, as well as thoroughly Christian. *(Note the Mother of God's bowed head, in contrast to the raised chin common to the posture promoted by the modeling industry.)*

A Solid Caring for Others

Nowhere is inner beauty better demonstrated than in caring for others. Thinking about what will truly benefit other people - not merely catering to their wants, or to our own whims, is essential for cultivating true inner beauty in ourself and in others.



Guarding the Senses

In icons, the eyes are usually shown to be large, because they allow influences from the world to enter. As a result, those living a holy life must pay particular attention to everything that enters through the senses, especially the eyes.

Purity of Body

The Mother of God preserved her physical purity before, during, and after giving birth to Christ (shown by three stars on her icon [one is hidden behind the Lord in this icon]). To live a holy life like the saints, we are also called to maintain physical purity outside marriage, and faithfulness within marriage.

Putting on Godliness

In most icons of the Mother of God, the *Theotokos* (Bearer of God) is portrayed in colours to demonstrate the way she, as a human being (shown by her blue robe), took on God in herself (shown by her red overcloak). Similarly, we are each called to take on the likeness of Christ through our thoughts, actions, and prayers.

Model of Inner Beauty for all Christians

- CONSIDER:**
- ✓ Which of your friends are true friends who are looking out for your best interests, and which ones are just "social" friends?
 - ✓ List your friends on paper. Include other people you know are sick or in real need. Pray for them daily, saying simply, "Lord, have mercy on (Name)".

- CONSIDER:**
- ✓ What places and situations cause you the most temptation? How can you avoid them, or eliminate the temptations?
 - ✓ Make a monthly trip for confession and a conversation with a priest about your "inner life". Be honest and open, and take seriously any guidance given.