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.

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
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.

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.)

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.

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.

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.

Consider:
- Examine your wardrobe choices.
- Check your use of slang and suggestive language.
- List the things you see every day, noting what commands your attention.
- Practice averting your glance from things that excite, anger, or attract you.
- 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.

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).”