

Ghana's Cardinal Turkson appreciates significance of Baltimore

The celebrant of 5:30 p.m. Mass June 16 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore had a rare appreciation for America's first cathedral – and the Archdiocese of Baltimore's status as the Premier See.

"I happened to have been a bishop also, in the first diocese in Ghana," said Cardinal Peter Turkson, who served as archbishop of Cape Coast in Ghana from 1992 to 2009. "Being over here in the first diocese (in the United States) and the first cathedral, that sentiment is awesome. I'm glad for the opportunity to have been able to worship with the community here."

He received his "red hat" in 2003, and last year was named the first prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, which is responsible for social justice issues such as migration, health, charitable works and the care of creation. Previously, Cardinal Turkson was president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

In his current position, he promotes the papal views on a social economy. Cardinal Turkson was in Baltimore for a roundtable discussion earlier in the day at Loyola University Maryland, which was hosted by the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Conscious Venture Lab and SHIFT Ventures, and the university's Sellinger School of Business.

The event aimed to expand entrepreneurship, increase economic opportunity, provide information on the idea of a social economy and combine business practices with those of Catholic social teaching.

"Last night and today I met a group of young entrepreneurs committed to transforming life in this city. They think that the news that gets out of here, from

Baltimore, is always violence, so they want to make a difference,” Cardinal Turkson said. “So that’s why I try to encourage them by saying ‘You have a mission – get going!’”

Cardinal Turkson is considered by some to be a potential successor to Pope Francis, and his visit attracted faithful from across Charm City to the basilica.

“I heard Cardinal Turkson speak at the National Black (Catholic) Congress last year,” said Rochelle Parker, a parishioner of St. Peter Claver and St. Pius V in Baltimore. “I had to hear him again.”

In his homily, Cardinal Turkson used Mark’s Gospel and the other readings to illustrate his message that God’s power, which he described as similar to that of a seed.

As in the parables, the seeds have the power to flourish in any terrain with the right care and nourishment. Similarly, God’s power is within each faithful person to make positive change around them.

“We just need to trust that God is working in each of us to make his plan come to fruition,” he said.

Missions, he said, might include one’s home, workplace or society as a whole. At this Mass, he said, the congregation gathered to recognize their missions.

“It was very encouraging to just keep hope, stay encouraged and know that God is going to work in you if you just give him the chance,” said Irving Nestor, a computer engineering student at The Johns Hopkins University and parishioner of Ss. Philip and James in Charles Village.

“The cardinal preaches the just word of love,” said Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori in his welcome, “in the spirit of Pope Francis.”

Email Emily Rosenthal at erosenthal@CatholicReview.org

