

Seeing the bigger picture of our church

In the Gospel of the second Sunday of Lent, we heard St. Matthew's account of the Transfiguration of Jesus. With Peter, James and John on Mount Tabor, we are presented with the image of the transfigured Christ, standing along with Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets. So many rich images are presented in this account. First, the disciples are given a glimpse of the glory of the Son of God, foreshadowing his resurrection. Secondly, with the great figures of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus is shown as the fulfillment of God's promise. Thirdly, as the vision passes, Jesus urges the disciples to come down the mountain so that they can continue his ministry and journey with him to Jerusalem and ultimately to his own death and resurrection.

Peter, James and John were given a great privilege on that mountain in witnessing the larger picture, both the present ministry of Jesus and his eventual glory. As the church of Baltimore, we are graced with the larger picture in the ways we experience the many cultures that enrich our local church. For many of us who are well-established in our area, it is sometimes difficult to fathom the number of places and cultures in which our church has taken root and continues to blossom. Yet, in many of our parishes on any given weekend, we may see some of our fellow parishioners in the beautiful dress of the countries of Africa, experience the bilingual hymns of English and Spanish or see the shrine to the Blessed Virgin Mary so dear to those who are far from their homelands. In a recent interview on 60 Minutes, Archbishop Timothy Dolan noted that the most visited shrine in the Cathedral of St. Patrick in New York is the one dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of visiting the Esperanza Center on South Broadway. Having spent the early part of my childhood just a few blocks away, I noted the many changes that have taken place along one of Baltimore's widest streets. The presence of many Hispanic restaurants and stores brought home to me the difference that two generations have made since I walked those blocks as a child. In the center, which is sponsored by our Catholic Charities and named for

“Hope,” the various services ranging from English as a second language to basic medical care illustrate the great needs that are present in our immigrant communities and the ways in which so many people are involved to address those issues. I met people who see the bigger picture at work in our archdiocese through their volunteer service at the Esperanza Center. It is refreshing to see just this one instance of what we celebrate at weekend Mass brought to practical service in the midst of God’s people.

For Peter, James and John, it might have been much more comfortable to remain on Mount Tabor, basking in the presence of Jesus’ glory with Moses and Elijah. Yet, Jesus did not allow them to remain there, for they would not have experienced the rest of the journey with him. The picture for them would not have been complete, for they would not have understood the mission of Jesus without experiencing his death and resurrected presence. Just as Jesus had urged his three disciples onward, so does he urge us on in the mission of our church. Jesus does not ask a few to join him, but he asks all of us to be one with him as we seek to take in the larger picture of all God’s people. As we journey through these 40 holy days of grace, may we be ever mindful of the needs of our church, particularly of those whose journeys have brought them far from their homes and families, into our very midst.