

# St. Mary Parish Vision Statement: A Reflection

by Fr. Don Cambe

## Transforming and Empowering Encounter

I did not have any idea how the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is done until I moved to the United States in 2014. I remember my Pastor then, Monsignor Dan Mayall, coming to my office one morning and asking me to facilitate the RCIA Program at Holy Name Cathedral. I was hesitant at first. Why? I told Dan that I had no experience of nor witnessed an RCIA program at all. I'm sure that RCIA was discussed in class during my seminary formation but it remained as a concept for me – for I came from a country that's predominantly Catholic and infant baptism is the norm. So when Dan asked me that morning, I told him I'm taking on the task – and I want to learn more. I read books, I attended seminars and of course, took part and immersed in weekly sessions with the catechumens and candidates at the cathedral. One thing stood out: I saw in them the desire to enter into a deep relationship with God.

### *Accompaniment*

I've become involved in running the RCIA program in the years that followed. At the beginning of each batch, I would usually invite the inquirers for a one-on-one conversation with the intention of getting to know them personally and hearing their "spiritual journey" that led them to giving the RCIA program a try. They would often talk about people who have inspired them – a colleague at work, professor in school, fiancé, in-laws, conversation with random individuals, among others. They recognize that at some point in their lives, they met – unexpectedly – someone who talked about God and his/her faith, and was willing to accompany them. And that loving presence and patient company opened their eyes to want to see more about the Catholic faith and encounter the Lord and let Him into their lives.

This Sunday, "Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves." Imagine Jesus figuring out what lies ahead of him as a result of his obedience to the will of the Father – he will be betrayed, persecuted, put to death. Yet in that moment of prayer, he was transfigured and was assured that he was not alone. The Father was there with him, loving and affirming him, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.*" And all this was witnessed by his disciples, together with Moses and Elijah. Their presence brought so much consolation to Jesus who was about to face his trial.

### *Encountering Jesus in the Community*

In our own lives, we are faced with challenges – decline in health, loss of a loved one, unplanned transitions, marriage breakdown, financial crisis, etc. Like Jesus, we go up our own "mountain" to try to make sense of our situation, and hope to find the presence and assurance of God. And God does not fail. As we try to surround ourselves with people who can keep us strong during those times, people who are willing to embrace us at the lowest point in our lives, we discover that there too is God crying with us and lovingly carrying our cross with us. God is faithful as he tells each one of us, "You are my beloved son/daughter, with whom I am well pleased."

Our various experiences of encounter with God invite us to communion and this is what our parish envisions: ***That all generations at St. Mary and in the surrounding community encounter Jesus and live as His disciples.*** We discover that we are all wounded and are in need of the grace and mercy of God. And as a community, we pray together as we all long for healing and encounter with our God. Our brokenness connects us with one another, not isolate us more. We accompany each other and be accountable for we are all brothers and sisters in faith.

### ***"Rise, and do not be afraid"***

At the sight of Moses and Elijah and Jesus' transfiguration, the disciples were terrified, "but Jesus came and touched them, saying, '*Rise, and do not be afraid.*'" Sometimes, we wonder how we can help others encounter Jesus. Sometimes, we are confused where or how to begin. Sometimes, we may feel unmoved and would rather not reach out to anyone for fear of being rejected. Sometimes, we feel so broken that we feel unworthy to minister to others. Amidst all these "sometimes," listen to the voice of God saying, "*Rise, and do not be afraid.*" Let not fear overwhelm us that we fail in doing our part in building the Kingdom of God. Young or not-so-young, you can definitely do something that's life-changing. You have something to share! Come and be involved in our parish ministries. Do not be afraid.

It's almost six years since I moved to the United States and I still have much to learn about RCIA for it's not a one-size-fits-all program. But one thing is constant: there's a desire in every individual to get to know God and enter into a

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relationship with Him. St. Augustine was so right when he said, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” Yes, God does not give up on us. He reaches out and speaks to us in various ways, so we allow Him to encounter us wherever we are in our lives, no matter how broken we are.

After our encounter with God, we all come down from our mountain assured and loved. Don’t just keep that life-transforming experience to yourself. Be a disciple to others too! Share your talents with our church!