

## THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

### *A Vision of Solidarity and Universality for Our Parish*

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When I was assigned five years ago to the Basilica parish, we had two communities that did not interact and practically had nothing to do with each other. The regular parish community rarely experienced any interaction with the Hispanic community that had been gathering in our parish church since the early 1990's. They were not counted as parishioners, though they came to this church every Sunday. A variety of priests rotated in from outside to provide the Mass in the Spanish language. And for all intents and purposes they were outsiders at our parish. However, as I began celebrating the Spanish Mass every Sunday, I saw their faithful dedication to the Catholic Sacraments, the beautiful and rich Catholic heritage that they bring from the Latin American experience, as well as the amazing organization of their community that was led especially by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart "ad gentes," Sister Celia and now Sister Imelda. With enthusiasm and a desire to be one with the regular parishioners of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Community desired ways of belonging. As the pastor of these people, too, I felt it my duty to begin that process of integrating the Spanish-speaking community with our English-speaking community.



We have made great strides in the five years that I have been the pastor to bring all of the Catholics that attend the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul on a regular basis into one community of faith. No doubt this is a project which will need to continue for years to come and is the source of lots of tension and strains in our community, especially as the resource of meeting space and scheduling conflicts arise. The reality is: the Hispanic community has grown to rival even the size and activities of the English-speaking community. If you look at our parish calendar you will see that there are just as many if not more events in Spanish as there are in English, including classes to teach our Spanish speakers the English language, which is a long and arduous process.

One of the major initiatives that I have undertaken as the pastor to help this process of making two separate communities one is the introduction of our "bilingual Mass" on holy days of obligation and other major solemnities of the year. Whereas before, we had scheduled an English Mass and a Spanish Mass when there were not always priests to celebrate both, in effect, simply doubling my duties, I thought it opportune to combine our resources and offer one Mass on these more important celebrations where both communities could be involved, and that we might introduce a new element of unification that stems from our heritage as Latin rite Catholics. Utilizing the Latin language for the Eucharistic prayer and the Our Father (*Pater Noster*) we have been able to pray for the first time as a community with one voice, *una voce*. In addition to those parts, we have also learned together to sing the ancient and traditional music of the Church, especially the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* (Glory to God in the highest), the *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus* (Holy, holy, holy), and the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God): words that we should know automatically in our hearts even as we sing them in the ancient language of the Church, with the added benefit that we are united not only with our ancestors in the faith, but even more profoundly, with our neighbor who does not speak our native tongue. And yet with the bridge that our Catholic faith provides us, we have made a connection, and we can truly say that we are one.



I readily acknowledge that building this bridge is an arduous task. The Latin language is oftentimes difficult and seemingly insurmountable for many who have been taught to despise it or to think that it was relegated to the trash can by recent movements in the Church. However, as we have attempted through our Joy of Tradition theme, we rejoice that the Church calls us to this unity, stemming from the very words of the Second Vatican Council in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #54 - "...steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them."



The bilingual experience also gives us an opportunity for solidarity with our brothers and sisters who live in a foreign land and daily deal with a foreign language. We are called to have a heart of compassion, even if we disagree with the means by which a person has come to this land, for the difficulties that arise from the experience of migration. I myself lived for six years in Italy, where I had to learn the Italian language and come to understand the Italian culture. It did not happen overnight. It took more than a year for me to be comfortable speaking the Italian language, which is far easier than English to learn. And every chance that I got, I sought out an English speaking Mass, which there were, at several parishes in Rome, as well as our own college where I lived. But the bilingual experience, by which we hear half of the readings in our native tongue and the other half in a foreign language, dips our toe into the great Catholic principle of solidarity, as well as the Catholic reality of universality. By experiencing the bilingual Mass we are challenged to break out of the smallness of parochialism and regionalism and to set foot into the heavenly court, where every nation and every tongue proclaims to the glory of God that Jesus Christ is Lord. At times, it requires sacrifice to sit and listen to something that is not immediately accessible to our understanding. However, Jesus gives us a Word on this: unless you turn and become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Little children readily accept things that they do not understand, trusting that their parents are not giving them something bad.

Another reason for the bilingual experience and the joining of the two communities is that there is a mutual enrichment between the two. We learn so much from their dedication, zeal, and community and family mentality. We have the great privilege of exemplifying for them what America really stands for and what it means to live in a land of opportunity. We are able to share with them the great heritage of sacred music and traditional liturgy that has been lost in many of the Latin American cultures. As I said before, this process of integration is only in its infancy, and we should not become disheartened by how difficult it is. While we have much to share with those who have migrated into our communities, we have much more to learn from them what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. As we recall the Thanksgiving holiday in our country, we recognize that at one point our forebearers relied on the hospitality and generosity of the native peoples of this land to survive the cold and starving winter. Let us be thankful for the many blessings that come to us through the perseverance and endurance of this American experience of hospitality and generosity. And let us seek to have an open heart to the call in our community to solidarity and universality, stemming from our one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic faith.



Rev. J. David Carter