



There was this small town nearby where I grew up: just over 3,500 call Carey, Ohio, home nowadays. However, it brings in tens of thousands of visitors every year. Because, back in the late 1860's, its first church was built, originally bearing the name of St. Edward, a Roman Catholic parish. Once the construction was completed, it was given to the care of a priest from the next village over. Along the way, that priest encouraged the new members of the up-and-coming parish to pray to Mary to bless the whole process and their faith for what lied ahead. With that in mind, he obtained a replica of a famous statue of the mother of our Lord from Europe. And when it arrived, they decided to make a seven-mile procession to the new church in Carey.

As the story so goes, while they marched, "a severe storm raged in the entire area. Though the faithful could see the rain pouring down on all sides of them for the entire seven-mile walk, not a drop touched the statue [of Mary] nor anyone in the procession." Because of that, soon enough, St. Edward became the Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. Again, bringing in tens of thousands of our Roman Catholics siblings in Christ to this small speck of a town in northwest Ohio, to make an annual pilgrimage to this site where they believe Mary paid a special visit in protecting their ancestors nearly 150 years ago now. I know plenty of us Lutherans struggle with the whole Mary thing in the Catholic church, and question just how much she actually intercedes in the day-to-day living, but it still connects with the Transfiguration story that we heard this morning. After all, we humans, including us Lutherans, have a tendency to want to build these dwellings, to house the holy one, almost as if we want to keep the divine, the holiness feeling, any mountaintop experience whatsoever in a nice box, lest we lose all of that thrill, including God forever.

Except, as that Transfiguration story so goes, Jesus insists on coming down the mountain. Not to stay in some made-up dwelling box higher-up, closer to the heavens. Jesus insists on coming down the mountain, into nearby small towns, to the streets, to homes, and deeper into human life than we could ever possibly imagine.

Now, if you were to walk out the front doors of the Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation and go down the street a couple blocks and turn to the left, you would come upon this art gallery. But this isn't the kind of place displaying the works of Van Gogh or Monet or some of the most famous pieces in history. Instead, the artists are from a nearby school, specializing in helping those who are differently-abled. Those students are brought to the art gallery, to "explore their own creativity and artistic [talents] with the help of a professional art facilitator. The artists create their work on-site in the downtown storefront gallery which is also open for retail sales of the artwork. [Their] work is [put] on display alongside [those] of several local artists...[All] intended to showcase the gifts and talents of people [who are often looked down upon, including sometimes by the church], while at the same time meaningfully connecting them to their local community."

That place may not have the spectacular architecture of the basilica only a few blocks away, a national shrine that almost convinces people that God must dwell there, but I have a feeling there is just as much Jesus inside that art gallery as there is in Our Lady of Consolation. Yes, Jesus does spend time on altars and in pews, but I have a feeling he insists on walking out the front doors and going into the neighborhoods, into art galleries, and going further still into the depths of our hearts, the ultimate dwelling place of our Lord. And not just to those who make pilgrimages, whether it be once or twice a year, or every week, to a church building, but also to those who are not so sure they will be welcomed there, to those with differing abilities, who find a way to connect with God by making works of art for others to see the transcendent beauty of the Divine that is not meant to be limited to a high-up mountain, but on the ground level of our imperfect, but precious humanity.

Rest assured, Jesus will continue to provide his fair share of mountaintop experiences for us, and we will often desperately try to stay there as long as we can, for such thrilling moments. But at some point, we will have to come down those mountains, too, into days of normalcy and stress and wondering where our life goes from there. And yet, Christ will insist there is just as much beauty down there as there is on the mountaintop. Because, down here, there is just as much love, just as much compassion, just as much God on the ground level of our homes and storefronts and all-around day-to-day living. As if absolutely nothing will ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord, on Sabbath worship days and every day in between. Christ insisted on coming down not just from a mountain, but from the cross, out of the tomb, and into our hearts, with no intention whatsoever on ever leaving that most cherished dwelling place within us. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

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