

Bishop Cantu to Encuentro Catholics: Don't become spiritual tumbleweeds

DALLAS (CNA) -- The Hispanic community in the United States produces many fruits, but must be careful to water the roots, Bishop Oscar Cantú warned the crowd at V Encuentro.

Cantú, along with Cardinal Blaise Cupich of Chicago, and three lay speakers on a panel, spent the morning praising the unique gifts of the Hispanic community in the United States, but cautioned against growing too complacent in their faith and ignoring the potential of young people.

Bishop Cantú, who has transferring to the San Jose Diocese in California from New Mexico, related his experience living in Las Cruces with the current state of the Church in the United States and the Latino community in particular.

In Las Cruces, Cantú encountered a tumbleweed for the first time -- a plant that had dried up and detached from its root system and literally tumbled away.

"I wonder sometimes, reflecting on a very changed world, a world that is changing before our very eyes -- so rapidly and so drastically, said Cantú.

"I wonder and I worry, sometimes: Are we becoming spiritual tumbleweeds?"

One risks becoming a "spiritual tumbleweed," he said, if their roots are not sufficiently deep during a dry season, the bishop explained. He spoke during a panel for the National V Encuentro, a gathering of Hispanic Catholics throughout the United States.

"And the dry season is here, my friends, and it will be a long one," said Cantú. Now is the time, he said, for people to "dig deep so that our roots may find water, that our roots may find living water."

Cantú recounted a story from his time in seminary, when he accidentally genuflected when entering a row in a movie theater. He said that people today long for something sacred within their "spiritual DNA," and when they do not encounter this, they end up treating the non-sacred objects things as if they are in fact sacred.

"People are not finding what is truly sacred," he said, and "because they encounter you and me, that are supposed to show signs of the sacred, and maybe they don't see it."

People should strive to tap their roots into the "living water" in order to produce sacred fruit, Cantú advised the crowd.

"The human heart still yearns for what is beautiful, for what is truly beautiful, for what is good, and for what is true. We have that. The church has what is truly good, what is truly beautiful and good. His name is Jesus Christ."

After Cantú spoke, he appeared on a panel with three laypeople--Sean Callahan, president and CEO of Catholic Relief Services; Brenda Noriega, Young Adults Ministry Coordinator, Diocese of San Bernardino; and Wanda Vásquez, Hispanic Ministry Director, Archdiocese of New York--where they discussed the fruits that had emerged from the four-year V Encuentro process.

Vásquez said it was “amazing” how people came together, and how the eight dioceses in her Encuentro region were able to work alongside each other during the planning stages. She particularly highlighted how the more experienced people were able to share their expertise with younger members, and that while “we are a young church, but we also are an experienced Church.”

Cantú and Noriega both said that young Hispanics need to be included in leadership positions and reminded of their particular talents. Noriega first began working in Hispanic ministry for her diocese at the age of 25, and she reiterated that it was extremely important to “make sure young people are sat at the table” and given positions on things like parish councils.

Cantú said that he often encounters discouraged youth, and that he himself felt similar growing up in a time where “it was a liability to be Hispanic.” He said that when he was applying to seminary, he was praised by a religious sister for being bilingual and fully immersed in two cultures. This sister told him that he would be “a gift to the Church,” and that he hopes the larger Latino community will “never forget that you are a blessing to the Church.”

Callahan reminded the crowd to keep their doors open to the stranger, and to also be cautious about identifying only as “Hispanic Catholics.” He believes the Latino Catholic community has the ability to lift up the entire Church, and should take steps to build bridges with the rest of the Church in the United States.

He advised people that even though the attendees of the non-Spanish Masses at a parish may look different from them, they should go out of their way to interact with them and get to know them.

“Let’s build a united church, so we can start lifting up everyone in the Catholic Church in the United States,” said Callahan, to loud applause.

Cupich, who led the morning prayer, had a slightly more optimistic look on the future of the Church than Cantú. Cupich said that he feels the Church in the United States is experiencing a “new birth,” and the Latino community is a big part of this panel. The cardinal was critical of what he called an “overly rational, logical, cerebral” approach to God in American culture, and that “faith is not only about what we hold, but it is about who holds us.”

This, explained Cupich, is where Latino culture comes in.

“The Latino experience is reminding us that faith is not only about what we hold, but who holds us,” he said.

Cupich said that while like in any birth there are “pains” and “sacrifices,” but he is convinced that the Church, as well as non-Catholic Americans, “will one day look back at the contribution you (Latinos) are making to our faith, and yes, to our nation, and rejoice at the new birth that has taken place.”