



Not too long after we moved to northeast Ohio, we knew one of our first trendy stops had to be the Cleveland Museum of Art with its over 50,000 works spanning over half a millennia. I'm not exactly an expert in the field, to say the least, but I can at least pretend to be one taking the extra time to read all the labels by the masterpieces, and trying to appreciate the immense skill with all the time and effort it must have taken to bring them all to life. Of course, there is a fair share of religious artwork dating back to the Renaissance and medieval periods. It's almost as if it was and still remains the job of such artists to help us observers realize, just in case we missed it in the story, whether in Biblical pages, or in our own world, just in case we missed it: something marvelous is going on here. The creative ones must work to shape something that will make us stop in our always-on-the-go tracks and consider the very beauty of God that we so often take for granted.

Now, one painting that does not hang on the walls in the University Circle area of Cleveland, but remains one of the most soul-catching works for me, at least, is **Ron Dicianni's depiction of the story we just heard.** It's entitled "Simeon's Moment," crafted just over 25 years ago, a relatively young piece in the grand scheme of the Van Gogh's and Monet's, but there is still something about it that continues to stick with me. Of course, it starts with Simeon's reaction in holding the Christ child. Yes, the adage still goes with works of arts crafted thousands of years ago, or within our own lifetime, they are all worth a thousand words. I know I cannot reach all of them, no matter how many times I have seen the colorful masterpiece, but when I see the aged temple leader, I see fulfillment, joy, hope, relief, grace, exuberance, finally.

And hopefully you can also see that coming from the Christ child is a glowing light, because in him was supposed to be the light not just for Simeon, not just for the testing-in-patience-too Anna, but for all the world. Now, more than likely the young one being held in the elder's arms has absolutely no idea what's going on, no clue what the big deal is, no awareness to his impact that was about to be felt on humanity. And yet, the breath-taking light was already ignited in him. He was already ministering to a man who had to wonder if his long-awaited moment of witnessing the Messiah brought to life was ever going to come.

And then Dicianni makes an intentional choice in drawing in the nations behind them, as if that very child was brought to life for all of it, for all of us. A world that back in Simeon's time was not perfect, by any stretch of the imagination. A portion of our human story in which empires were dead-set on gaining more...everything at the expense of the vulnerable, lusting over more land and resources and as much overall wealth and power as possible. And yet, the child is born into the very thick of it all, into a time and place with its fair share of gloom and despair and dismal outlooks on life.

And so I wonder if in Simeon's soul-catching expression on his face are also tears with knowing what's about to happen to the precious child, as the story so goes of Simeon's humble attempt to prepare the child's mother for what's about to happen to him; that, part of the thousand words in viewing this image, are fear, trepidation, mocking, persecution, betrayal, crucifixion, even execution. Simeon knows full well that no matter how much this child insists on proclaiming love and grace and mercy and peace and a Gospel that is meant to stop humanity in its often self-for-seeking tracks, that world will not always respond in kind. Safe to say, we're still working on that not just out there, but in the church as well.

However, after saying all of that, I'm not so sure Dicianni envisioned this with his painting, but I like to think the Holy Spirit can still take it to another level anyway. I like to think that with Simeon's

reaction to the Christ child being presented to him, is exactly how God feels when embracing you, not just when you may have been baptized, and presented as a disciple of Christ, in a way; but every day, God is filled with joy over you, another precious child of the Divine. Yes, there are some days when we don't live up to the boundless love of Jesus Christ, to be sure, and yet for some reason, God still doesn't stop in adoring us, in adoring you. And God doesn't stop in believing the impact we can make, a holy effect on the church, on the home, on the world, that we may not always are willing to accept, but the Holy Spirit will never stop from being ignited to shine forth in us, in you. All made possible, because Simeon's dream was fulfilled: a dream he had not just for himself and Anna, but for all times and places. And just in case we missed the Gospel, artists of paintings and music and poetry and so much more will keep on working to stop us in our tracks so that we may never forget that nothing will ever happen in this world to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. So, for that Greatest News brought to life on Biblical pages and artistic renderings and in your journey of faith as well, thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!