

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Dec 12th 2017

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe



The appearance of the Virgin Mother of Jesus at Guadalupe, near Mexico City, is the event that serves as the foundation for this feast. It is one of many events over the centuries in which Mary appears to the poor and dispossessed, asking them to speak to the powerful a word of warning or correction. The Archbishop of Mexico was a representative of the wealthy, powerful, Spanish conquistadors. He was appointed to his place as Bishop by the Spanish Crown. Spain had wrung permission to appoint all the Bishops in Spanish territories in the Americas from the Papacy because of the victory of a Spanish prince over the Muslims at Lepanto. The Spaniards brought a version of Catholicism to the New World, but then corrupted its practices by using ecclesial leadership positions to reward men who were more loyal to the crown's power than they were either to the Church or, more importantly, to Christ. The appearance of the Mother of God to an impoverished native American was a clear statement of God's favor bestowed on the poor and humble instead of the rich and powerful. It was also a word of warning to power that their power would be struck down and destroyed.

Today's liturgical feast, then, of the patroness of the New World (the Americas) and especially of Mexico, reminds us that seeking worldly power is almost a guarantee of God's disfavor. Wealth is given to be shared so that everyone has their human dignity honored by virtue of their basic needs being met.

The readings of the Mass, from the book of the prophet Zechariah, the Book of Revelations and the Gospel of Luke, point to Mary's role as a key sacrament and voice for the presence of the Lord. The stories of the Annunciation and the Visitation are both options for our meditation – pointing to Mary's compliance with God's Will and her servant love toward her cousin, Elizabeth whom she went out of her way to visit. This pregnant older woman recognizes her young cousin's visit to be a sign of God's coming. The text particularly illuminates the role of the pregnant Mary as the bearer of God.

It is this same pregnant Mary who appears in the dress and visage of Our Lady of Guadalupe-close-up-an Aztec Princess, the compassionate mother of the Aztec people, when she comes to the Native American Juan Diego on his way to Mass. Mary appears to him carrying Jesus in her womb, to bring the good news of salvation, and its attendant hope. She asks him to bear her message to the powerful Spanish Archbishop. The message was not lost on that biblically literate man that Mary's visit brought God's mercy to this people that he was bishop for, but had apparently neglected in his pursuit of his own power interests. My contemplation of that scene brought questions to me, the citizen of a wealthy and powerful nation that seems to want to drive out Juan Diego's descendants, the very ones who aroused Mary's compassion, who live among us on this side of the Rio Grande River.

My own most haunting prayer, however, came through contemplating the prophetic text that is the first reading of today's Mass. In the last few weeks we have heard much about Jerusalem being made the capital of the secular nation of Israel. In the Zechariah text, we hear God commanding his people to "Sing and Rejoice because He (God) is coming to dwell among His people in his Holy City." Many nations will come together because the city is to be God's city, not the realm of any civil ruler! (the name Jerusalem means the city of God's peace.) All who recognize the authority of God are to sing and rejoice at God's coming and claiming His city – all others are to keep silent. This striking contrast between singing joyfully, and keeping silent leapt off the page to me, as counter responses to God's coming. My heart wants to sing and rejoice that God is coming to dwell with God's people. But what of silence – stunned silence at the hubris of humans to claim God's city for their own?

Such is Mary's message today through the people of Mexico and the people of God throughout the world – all those who align themselves with Mary and with the poor to whom she comes to give hope and strength. I find myself praying that God will let the message of God's mercy be the voice of my heart and my mouth as Mary points us to the coming Emmanuel – God with us!

"My soul rejoices in the Lord! My Spirit finds its joy in God my Savior!"

