

Our Lady of Guadalupe: Justice for the Outcast

Homily for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe 2018
Zechariah 2:14-17; Revelation 11:19a, 12:1-6a, 10ab; Luke 1:26-38

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Peace be with you! Each year I conclude the diocesan celebrations in honor of our Lady of Guadalupe with a final Mass here at the Cathedral. As the mother church of the Diocese of Yakima the Cathedral is very much like the mantle of our Lady of Guadalupe, extending protection and welcome to any pilgrims from any parishes who come for worship. So, to all of you: Welcome! And to those of you from neighboring parishes: A very special welcome. Thank you for joining us and know that the Cathedral is also your parish.

Yet the mantle of Blessed Virgin Mary with her apparition at Tepeyac has a particular meaning for us as well. As you know there are many devotions of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Lourdes in France, Fatima in Portugal, Czestochowa in Poland, Altötting in Germany, and La Vang in Vietnam but to name a few. What marks her appearance in what would be today's Mexico City as unique is that – among all the other devotions – this is the only apparition where the Blessed Virgin Mary appears as a pregnant woman.

Note well the images on her mantle. She is great with child. The symbols and decorations of her mantle are actually Aztec symbols of fertility. To the ancient peoples of Mexico, looking at her mantle and at her dress, they would instantly know that this Blessed Virgin Mary is about to give birth.

And what does she say when she discovers she is about to give birth to the savior of the world? What is the core message of that mystery of the rosary we call the "Visitation?" Her reaction to the news is what she says to her cousin Elizabeth: "The Lord has done great things for me! Holy is his name! He has mercy on every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and has sent the rich away empty."

Let me pause at this point. These words when Mary discovers she is about to give birth to the Savior are words that prophesy the power of God in a corrupt and sinful world. These words are not words of comfort for those who build walls. These words are not words of comfort for those who would kidnap and extort. These words are not words of comfort for those who separate children and parents. These words are not words of comfort for those who would turn away asylum seekers, migrants and refugees.

In a very telling part of his encyclical "Spe Salvi" our Holy Father Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI speaks of the final judgment – not so much as an act of justice but as an act of mercy. In an unusual turn, Benedict cites the German philosopher Theodor Adorno from the Frankfurt School of Critical Philosophy. Adorno as well as many of his colleagues fled Nazi Germany and the

persecution of the Jews. When Adorno returned, he asked what justice meant for those who died in the Holocaust. By extension he asked what justice would mean for anyone denied justice in this life. He concluded that if justice were to have any meaning it would need to be retroactive. It would need to extend back to the dead and not simply those alive and those yet to come who would hopefully enjoy the fruits of a more human justice.

Friends, you know this better than I. There is no human justice for the young mother in the lower valley who returned to her family in Mexico to deal with an aging parent, was kidnapped and whose loved ones here received a ransom note demanding an amount of money they could not fulfill. When the family here wired down what money they could, a trash bag arrived at the home of relatives in Mexico the next day with half her body, stating that “when we get the rest of the money, you’ll get the rest of her body.” There is no human justice for those who leave their homeland because of the violence of the narcotraficantes – narcotraficantes who flourish precisely because of our large market for illegal drugs here in the United States. There is no justice for the deceased young students studying to be teachers – “normalistas” – from the town of Ayotzinapa, Mexico who may well have been killed by local police and army personnel. There is no human justice for one of our own Yakima priests whose brother was kidnapped and murdered as part of an extortion. There is no human justice for families here in Yakima who lose their young men due to gang violence. No justice can bring back deceased loved ones. There is no human justice for those who are otherwise law abiding but get swept up in immigrations raids and are deported without legal due process. There is no human justice for the slander of political leaders who refer to Mexicans as rapists, and who whip up the basest emotions from their political followers for electoral gain.

Benedict XVI, entering into the philosophical insight of Teodor Adorno, suggests this is precisely how we reason back the final judgment that comes at the end of time when – like Jesus – all are raised from the dead. In our world we tend to see justice and mercy as competitive. We tend to see the virtue of mercy as knocking the edge from human demands for justice. What is justice if justice does not result in the punishment of the offender? How can justice and mercy coexist? Pope Benedict suggests that the final judgment is the ultimate act of mercy – mercy for those whose demands for justice remained unmet during their earthly life but where – at the end of time – all will transparently see the deeds of the wrongdoers judged fairly and when – as Mary proclaims – God will cast down the mighty from their thrones and lift up the lowly.

When we gaze at this image of Our Lady of Guadalupe how are we to assimilate the steep demands she speak in her Magnificat? Like her we must reverence her unborn child – Jesus. If we want justice to prevail in our daily lives – let alone for ourselves at the end of time – then we must dedicate ourselves to justice for the unborn whose lives are threatened by the scourge of abortion. Without the right to life there are no other human rights. Without justice for the unborn there will be no further justice for anyone. How we treat the most vulnerable in our midst is the test of justice for everyone else. What ties together the undocumented and the undocumented is their lack of legal standing and as a result their lack of access to justice. Our prayerful gaze at this unique image of the pregnant Blessed Virgin Mary, this apparition of Our

Lady of Guadalupe who bears the unborn child – Jesus – can reveal much to us about justice we must echo every time we pray her words from the famous prayer the Magnificat.

So, permit me to conclude with the entire prayer Mary proclaims when she discovers she is with child and about to give birth to Jesus the savior of the world.

***My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
My Spirit rejoices in God my Savior
For He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.***

***From this day all generations will call me blessed:
The Almighty has done great things for me,
And holy is His Name.***

***He has mercy on those who fear Him
In every generation.***

***He has shown the strength of His arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.***

***He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
And has lifted up the lowly.***

***He has filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich He has sent away empty.***

***He has come to the help of His servant Israel
For He has remembered His promise of mercy,
The promise He made to our fathers,
To Abraham and his children forever.***