

## Mother of All the Inhabitants in the One America

In January 1999 John Paul II promulgated the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a Feast day of the Church in all America. On that occasion, the Holy Father also referred to Our Lady as the Star of the First and New Evangelization. As a Mexican present at that memorable moment, I was very happy to hear these words in the very Shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico City. But what caught my attention the most was that the Pope entrusted the whole continent to the care of the *Morentia* (dark-skin young woman) of *Tepeyac*.

Hearing this prayer made by the Juan Pablo II himself caught me by surprise. Wasn't it true that María de Guadalupe was the patroness of Mexico, just as each Latin American country has its own Marian devotion and its own experience with the mother of our Brother and Savior? How then can Our Lady of Guadalupe be the patroness of all the Americas and what does she say to us today?

It was an experience in Guatemala that helped me find answers to these questions and to understand Our Lady of Guadalupe as the Mother of all in America. The reason for my trip to Guatemala was to participate in the II Missionary Continental Congress, along with more than three thousand missionaries representing every country in the in the Western Hemisphere. The opening celebration for the Congress included a procession with two religious images representing the unity across the Continent. One of them was an exact replica of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe during the previous several months. It was very moving to see the image of *La Guadalupana* enter the gathering site amid the singing and cheering of an assembly as diverse as the Continent itself. It was quite symbolic to see how the miraculous image imbedded in the humble cloak of the Indian Juan Diego, paved the way for another beloved image, especially by the people of Guatemala, the *Cristo Negro de Esquipulas*.

This missionary experience allowed me to see how María de Guadalupe gathers and protects all her children in America, and how even today she continues to announce the coming of her Son as our Brother and Savior. It also helped me understand how she is the bearer of the loving and liberating message of her Son Jesus Christ to all the peoples in America, from Alaska to *Tierra del Fuego*.

Reading the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* helped me to deepen my understanding of the original and present message of Our Lady of Guadalupe. "America, which historically has been, and still is, a melting-pot of peoples, has recognized in the *mestiza* face of our *Virgen of Tepeyac*, in the Blessed Mary of Guadalupe, an impressive example of a perfect inculturation." (The Church in America # 11)

The First Evangelization took place almost five hundred years ago in the midst of a cultural and racial encounter. It was then that María de Guadalupe appeared in the Continent as a young *mestiza*, thus affirming the dignity of all races and cultures that would form a new people; an American *mestizo* people born out of the blood of Native

Americans, Europeans and, later on, Black Africans. This remarkable encounter is described in a poem written in 1978 during the *Second National Encuentro Hispano de Pastoral*: “It is in this way that we were then who we are now. Children of Indians, Blacks and Spaniards, all united in the same great love; a diverse people gathered by the Lord. It is in this way that we were then who we are now.”

Reflection on this complex reality it can be said that *mestizaje* in the human dimension of globalization and María de Guadalupe is its most unifying presence. Her liberating message continues to as sign of joy, hope and consolation for those who suffer rejection due to their race, culture or social status:

“Listen, mi son the most vulnerable, worthy Juan: Where are you going?

“Know and understand well in your heart...that I am the Mother of the God of Great Truth, the One for Whom you Live, the Creator of all peoples ...”

“... I wish wholeheartedly that a holy place be erected for me at this site. In it I will show and give to the people all my love, my compassion, my help and my protection. Because I am your merciful Mother, yours and of all the nations who live in this land... There I will hear their cries, remedy their misery and cure them from their pain and sorrow.”

“... Let your face and your heart not be troubled, don't be afraid... Am I not here your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and my bosom...?”

The words of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego resound in our hearts today as they did long ago. They define with amazing clarity the liberating message of God, those for whom the message is for and the mission that is to be carried out. This is without a doubt a message of Advent in that announces with a sense of urgency the coming of our Savior; the fulfillment of the Good News that bring consolation and joy.

At the beginning of the Twenty-first Century we live in a globalized world in which a new *mestizaje* is taking place. Constant human mobility, cultural interaction and even interracial marriages are slowly giving birth to a new America, particularly here in the United States. In her dark-skin face Guadalupe embodies the indigenous peoples of the entire continent and through them, first destinaries of her liberating message. Through them and their trust in the Mother of the True God, this message reaches the Europeans, *Mestizos*, *Mulatos*, Black-Africans, Asians and, as María de Guadalupe said to Juan Diego, to all the inhabitants of this land. Today, the most vulnerable of human beings is also under her care as Guadalupe, the Pregnant Madonna, is widely known as the Patroness of the Unborn.

It is in this context that we can understand why the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, celebrated on December 12, is becoming a liturgical celebration that brings together the faithful from different cultural backgrounds and races as one community of faith, as one parish.

Along with other liturgical celebrations taking place in culturally diverse settings, it is important that the message of Our Lady of Guadalupe will harmonize with the themes of Advent contained in the lectionary. The selection of music is of particular importance to reach this harmony and to give the celebration its own unique flavor. The opening song should set a tone of welcome in which all the assembly can participate. A bilingual song with an up-beat rhythm and easy-to-sing lyrics that speak of different peoples coming together is highly appropriate for this occasion. The participation of children dancers from different cultural origins in the procession, including the traditional Aztec dancers, can help create an ambiance of awesome joy and profound unity. The use of indigenous instruments like flutes and drums can evoke the presence of God in the lives of the peoples of America through time. Using roses to decorate the temple is also recommended since they are the symbol chosen by Our Lady to leave her image for all to see and believe.

In some parishes, a representation of the apparitions of Our Lady takes place before Mass or even after the homily. In others, flowers are placed before the Image of our Lady after Communion as the assembly sings a soft and reflective hymn. The song can have a message of thanksgiving for the maternal protection received or can focus on the commitment to say *Yes* to God just as Mary did. The closing of the celebration can be similar to the opening in rhythm and movement, but highlighting the mission of all Christians: to be witnesses and bearers of the Good News of Christ just as María de Guadalupe, who walks along with us in our journey as the one people of the True God.