

Rv 11:19a - Lk 1:39-47

My dear sisters and brothers, moved by a deep devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, we gather tonight to celebrate an encounter with Her Son in the Eucharist. We gather around the altar knowing that many people who also hold a strong devotion are not able to do so. This has been a very difficult year for many of our sisters and brothers in Christ. Probably, it has also been especially difficult for some of us present here. People who usually attend pilgrimages, basilicas devoted to our Lady, and many other celebrations, are not able to do so. We are blessed by participating today in this celebration, and we unite our hearts to all those other hearts who are longing to celebrate in community this great mystery of our faith.

At the same time, it is in hard and difficult times, that Mary in her advocacy of Guadalupe, seems to become closer to her children. It is when hope is wavering, when doubts are surfacing, and when we feel alone and estranged, that Our Lady comes to our aid. It was almost five hundred years ago, when San Juan Diego encountered her for the first time. This was a time of deep desolation for those who had been conquered, whose religion had broken into pieces. Mary's love and compassion became a sign of hope to these dispirited people that God indeed cared for them. The decade after the events of the apparition witnessed millions of converts to the faith, and Our Lady of Guadalupe became the bridge that joined the cultures of the natives and the Spanish people.

Certainly, this same trait of Mary's personality, her desire to make herself available in times of need, is shown in the Gospel. The road to visit her cousin was not free of distress, danger, and difficulty, especially considering that she was pregnant. But her faith told her that God was with her, that the prophecy and the announcement coming from the angel would be fulfilled. She hurries to visit her cousin, who at an old age, surely would benefit from the help and presence of her relative. The gospel story tells us that Mary's presence and visit was not the greatest surprise and joy that filled Elizabeth. Mary brought her son, in her womb, with her. And Elizabeth's own son and her own spirit were filled with joy.

The study of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe assures us that the image of the Blessed Mother is that of a pregnant woman. The dark ribbon that goes around her waist was an announcement, clear to the natives who saw it, that she was expecting. That is why it is so fitting to celebrate her feast during the season of Advent. We are like Elizabeth, we are like the natives of Mexico, we are those who need the presence of the savior. We need the Mother of Hope to bring us this good news. Only she can do it with that tender heart that characterizes mothers. We can truly experience, by opening our heart to her, that we are safe, that we are protected, that we are loved. We can hear once again: "Am I not here, I who am your mother?"

As faithful children of Mary, let us follow her example, let us also fill our hearts and lives with the presence of Her Son, so that we can bring this joy to others. As Pope Francis reminded us, some years ago while celebrating this feast: "In Mary's school we learn to keep

walking to reach places where we need to be: on our feet, standing beside so many lives that have been lost or have been robbed of hope.”

May Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas, help us to be signs of hope in this difficult season of human history, knowing that the victory of Her Son is always assured to those who trust in Him.