

January 1, 2014 – Mary, Mother of God
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Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21

All the readings of the liturgy for this feast point to God's completely free and gracious outpouring of love. We discover that this love passes to and through one person or people and covers the earth and brings salvation to all. Salvation lived in the concrete gives meaning to our lives, a sense of belonging much larger than our own selves. It is also a profoundly intimate relationship of love with the Lord and his people, especially the most oppressed, despised, and abandoned. One person powerfully accompanies us in this journey/process: Mary, whose interior space of fruitful emptiness and utter trust invite us to let God be God in our lives too.

Theologians have written much about this title of Mary as Mother of God. In my own daily lived theology, when I think of Mary of Nazareth I see her in all the ways that people try to capture her essence as MOTHER...of us specifically. We know Jesus has shared her with us, and all over the earth people who know her portray her as part of their own culture.

Here in Oaxaca, Mexico, she has various faces but the most wonderful for me is Our Lady of Guadalupe. The story of how she appeared to Juan Diego to give comfort to the very distressed indigenous people and intervened for them with the church is kept in every Mexican heart, religious or not. She marches in all the struggles for justice and helps all who also struggle for their daily bread. She is especially there for the women who carry the main burden of feeding their families and run great risk of being killed because of their oppressed status. She is present in the communities where all kinds of mining and extractive industries are stealing land and water, and where also people are being assassinated, victims of greed and power without consciousness.

Sometimes people think she is a Goddess because she reflects so brilliantly the passionate love the Trinity has for us with a special preference for the oppressed and forgotten. I think myself that the Trinity sends her out front to act, so to speak, because she never invokes fear but trust. Of course whoever trusts in her is gently led to her son, our "mother Jesus" as Julian of Norwich calls him. My understanding is that where she is, the Trinity is also and vice-versa.

I have been very impressed with the force and quickness of her response to the people that I see here. I have many stories of how she has protected babies at high risk. One recent story comes from Celia, our "comadre" (co-mother because we are sacramental sponsors for two of her children). Celia went through a difficult pregnancy and because she could not work, she lost her job. Her husband Juan lost his job at the same time. They had taken out a loan for her mother's operation and now couldn't pay. At 42, Juan is "too old" to get another job. So, as often is the case of people living on the edge, they fell off. They were scrambling for food with Celia becoming very malnourished. We were able to accompany them, but more than anything our "Mother Guadalupe" gave them hope and a beautiful baby girl Xochitl Iyari (Xochitl: flower in the Nahuatl language and Iyari: heart of the universe in the Huichol).

Our little Mother (Madrecita) has been with us from the beginning here at our small Permaculture project, finding us the place and taking charge ever since. The land is named for her in Zapateco: "Luu Re Nan Vid Guadalupe," land of the Mother Guadalupe. We have only been brought here to sow a little work to care for the land and the people. We are not the protagonists and at the end we will provide natural fertilizer!

Pope Francis said, "If you want to know who Mary is, talk to theologians; if you want to know how to love her, talk to the people." We have been very fortunate in this little village of Huayapam and in Oaxaca to meet people of great faith, and I think in this very indigenous place my own Irish ancestry kicked in, and I felt I had come to a beautiful place and a real faith home.