

# Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 12, 2017



by Francisco Herrera

Tonantzin (Toh-nun-tzeen) is the Nahuatl name of Our Lady of Guadalupe, used still today by Nahuatl-speaking communities. Nahuatl was the equivalent of “Latin,” the language of most use in business, ceremony, etc., from - what we now know as - Utah to Nicaragua. So profound was the experience of her apparitions in 1531 that, still today men and women name their children in her memory. My own great-grandfather was named Guadalupe and my son Tonantzin.



My first experiences of “marches” were the pilgrimages in commemoration of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Calexico, California. Hundreds of parishioners from neighboring towns gathered to share a common faith in God’s faithfulness through “La Virgen,” and the compassionate embrace of a mother for her children. Our common sense was: “She walks with us! We are grateful!” Whether we call her Mary, Guadalupe or Tonantzin, she immerses you in the essence of Restorative Justice: Compassion and faithful accompaniment, which meets violence and heals and restores relations among all living beings.

Today’s scripture reaffirms the essence of God’s faithfulness through this special partnership with women. Revelations 11: 19A; 12:10AB presents “a woman, with the moon under her feet ... about to give birth,” facing violence and bringing forth, “salvation and power.” Luke 1:26-38 engulfs us in the experience of Gabriel, the messenger, asking young Mary to consider God’s invitation to be the mother of Jesus. Being this, the 12 of December we commemorate the miraculous apparitions of Mary to an elder of the Mexica (Meh-Shee-Kah) Nation, St. Juan Diego, asking him to tell the local religious authority to build a house where she can share her love with all.

Young Mary, and St. Juan Diego, both live in a land, traumatized by an invading army, and are called to action by a messenger of hope. An honest study of the European invasion reveals the level of genocide First Nation peoples experienced. This is what makes the experience of Guadalupe so powerful. Restorative Justice consists of action creating a space and a process of healing in the midst of “irreparable” harm done, as is the case of victim/offender dialogue, where the goal is wholeness despite the fact the loss has been devastating. It is a process of moving through the violence - not away from it - to wholeness. Mother Tonantzin approaches St. Juan Diego, revealing her desire to have a sanctuary, a shelter where she can “embrace, listen to and accompany” all “who come to me.” In young Mary’s story the Angel Gabriel is the messenger. In Mexico, Mary sends St. Juan Diego. She has the Archbishop construct a place of safety, free of violence where she offers compassion, open arms, without judgments, full of grace, “en-courage-ing” us to be messengers of hope and live compassion, which, liberates the victimized and frees those afflicted by the enslaving obsession to dominate, restoring balance/wholeness in relationships.

The death penalty, mass incarceration, our current economy of war is each a product of fear and violence, maintained by a myopic belief in punishment euphemized as “justice.” Compassion dispels that delusion. Compassion is courageous and intelligent. In the midst of violence, Mother Mary affirms St. Juan Diego, “Don’t be afraid ... Am I not here? Am I not your mother?” In a world of violence, dominated by patriarchy, belligerence and punishment, the calming voice of Woman emerges, addressing the heart, modeling for us the act of accompaniment, listening, being with the other in times of joy and tribulation, not promising pie in the sky, but rather offering compassion, here and now, creating a space where we can listen to each other; restoring life and balance, engaging very painful experiences, and restoring healthy relations.

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