

HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE
Sunday, 12 December 2021

- Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day
Part Two: reflection on the readings
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY
Lectionary: 92

Reading I [Zep 3:14-18a](#)

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!
Sing joyfully, O Israel!
Be glad and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has removed the judgment against you
he has turned away your enemies;
the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst,
you have no further misfortune to fear.
On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!
The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
and renew you in his love,
he will sing joyfully because of you,
as one sings at festivals.

Responsorial Psalm [Is 12:2-3, 4, 5-6.](#)

R. (6) Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.
God indeed is my savior;
I am confident and unafraid.
My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.
With joy you will draw water
at the fountain of salvation.
R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.
Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name;
among the nations make known his deeds,
proclaim how exalted is his name.
R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement;
let this be known throughout all the earth.

Shout with exultation, O city of Zion,
for great in your midst
is the Holy One of Israel!

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Reading II [Phil 4:4-7](#)

Brothers and sisters:

Rejoice in the Lord always.

I shall say it again: rejoice!

Your kindness should be known to all.

The Lord is near.

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
make your requests known to God.

Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Alleluia [Is 61:1 \(cited in Lk 4:18\)](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [Lk 3:10-18](#)

The crowds asked John the Baptist,
“What should we do?”

He said to them in reply,

“Whoever has two cloaks
should share with the person who has none.

And whoever has food should do likewise.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him,
“Teacher, what should we do?”

He answered them,

“Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.”

Soldiers also asked him,

“And what is it that we should do?”

He told them,

“Do not practice extortion,
do not falsely accuse anyone,
and be satisfied with your wages.”

Now the people were filled with expectation,
and all were asking in their hearts
whether John might be the Christ.
John answered them all, saying,
“I am baptizing you with water,
but one mightier than I is coming.
I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor
and to gather the wheat into his barn,
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”
Exhorting them in many other ways,
he preached good news to the people.

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

I know a woman who is old and elegant. She comes to church in a traditional black shawl. I call her “Doña” – a form of address in Spanish that is both respectful and affectionate.

She was born into a poor family in an isolated part of Mexico. School was too far to walk to and, besides, if her family was to eke out a living from the few acres the Revolution had provided them, she would have to stay home and work the land.

As a result, Doña lives in a world rather different than the world I inhabit. My world is full of writing that constantly demand my attention. Letters are noisy and competitive. Letters that are always saying, “read me.” In contrast, Doña does not seem to hear the noisy chatter of the letters that surround people like me. She prefers to live in a world shaped by images.

Doña has taught me that images have their own, silent way of speaking.

When I see this fine old woman seated before the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I am filled with wonder before the Mystery of the God who has a thousand ways of finding us and touching our hearts with his grace. Doña, holy and precious in the eyes of the Lord, may not read a lot of books like I do. Instead, she knows how to sit quietly and rest in the presence of images.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is such an image. And today is her feast day.

Guadalupe is not a book to be read, but I assure you, she has come to us with a message. She is announcing the Gospel to us all. To hear this Good News, I suggest we forego our preoccupation with noisy letters and enter into Doña’s world as she sits, with great serenity, before the image of Our Lady.

If you ask her, she will tell you a version of the following story.

Some twelve years after Cortez burned his ships at Vera Cruz and brought down the Aztec Empire, a baptized Indian was walking near Tepeyac, a little hill outside Tenochtitlan (what is today Mexico City).

His name was Juan Diego.

A woman, numinously beautiful, appeared to him, and said, "I am your Mother." She spoke to Juan Diego in Nahuatl, the language of the Indigenous peoples, not Spanish, the language of the *conquistadores*. She told the Indian to ask Bishop Zumarraga to build a chapel for her there at Tepeyac.

At first, the bishop, a Spaniard and one of the highest officials of New Spain, would not make time for an Indian and his nonsense. Eventually, the skeptical Bishop asked the Indian to provide him with a sign that this "Lady" was real. In despair, Juan Diego, passing again by Tepeyac, tried to hide from the woman. But to no avail: the beautiful woman came again to the Indian and told him to pick the Castilian roses growing atop the hill at Tepeyac (in the New World, in December). She arranged this "sign" for the bishop in the Indian's *tilma* (a kind of *poncho* or *serape*).

In his final audience with Bishop Zumarraga, the frightened Indian spilled the roses on the floor of the bishop's office. Yet no one looked at the roses. Everyone looked at Juan Diego's *tilma*.

Doña will tell you that this happened on the twelfth of December 1531.

Guadalupe, I have said, is not a book to be read. And yet, all the same, she comes to us with a message. Her image is a proclamation of the Gospel.

But if we are to hear the Gospel proclaimed by her image, we must learn to sit like Doña sits before Guadalupe.



I am tempted to say that Doña “dwells” in the image before her. Maybe it is more accurate to say that Guadalupe embraces Doña and the two of them just rest with one another in a quiet, familiar intimacy.

Who is this Woman that embraces Doña? What is this Good News that her image proclaims?

No doubt Bishop Zumarraga had his own answer to this question. The image on Juan Diego’s *tilma* is a European *Madonna*. In fact, she was the Immaculate Conception of Mary. She stands clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet as foretold in the twelfth chapter of the Book of the Apocalypse:

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne.

Eventually, ecclesial authorities in Madrid and Rome would insist that Guadalupe be celebrated on the eighth of December, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. But the local Church in Mexico would have none of this. Guadalupe was a true Creole – born in the New World – and not some pale replica of a European Madonna. Her feast would be celebrated on the twelfth of December.

The Indigenous peoples of New Spain who looked on this image saw her as Tonanzin, the ancient Mother of the gods. Tonanzin was the compassionate mother who comforted the hundreds of thousands of human beings sacrificed by the Aztecs atop the pyramids in Tenochtitlan, their capital. Two great pyramids, one dedicated to the sun and the other to the moon, stood in what is today the *Zocolo* (the central plaza) of Mexico City. The Woman whose image is on the *tilma* of the humble Indian, stands above the moon and is eclipsing the sun, whose rays shine from behind her. Tonantzin has returned and banished the blood-thirsty gods of the Aztec overlords.

Today, the pyramids of Tenochtitlan are no more. But their stones have not gone far. The stones of the two pyramids were used to build the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Mexico in the Plaza.

I don’t think that Doña worries about such things. She rests quietly before the beautiful image that has embraced her since she was a little girl back in her far-off village in Mexico.

If you ask her, Doña can recite many of Guadalupe’s titles (more than I can).

Nuestra Señora

La Virgen de Tepeyac
Madre de todas las Americas
Patrona National de Mexico

But for Doña, before all the other titles bestowed on her, she is *La Morenita*.

This title doesn't translate very well into English. *La Morenita* means "the dear little dark one."

Our Lady of Guadalupe, *La Morenita*, is neither Indian nor European, neither Tonanzin nor the Immaculate Conception. Look at her serene face and see there the mixing of the European and the Indigenous races that came about after the *Conquista*.

Guadalupe is what later came to be known as a *mestiza* – indeed, she is the first *mestiza* and thus the first Mexican. Pope John Paul II called her "the first person of the New World."

The image of *La Morenita* tells out a great truth of our faith: reconciliation, even in the face of the horrible violence of the *Conquista*, is possible. In fact, reconciliation is what is being promised us in our future.

Look at her folded hands – for the Europeans, of course, this indicates that she is praying. For the Indigenous, however, the folded hands indicate that she is pointing at someone who is above her, someone who is to come after her.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is announcing the Good News: One day, despite our love of violence, we will finally be reconciled to one another. The One who is to come – the One to whom Guadalupe is pointing – will bring about a new era of peace for us all.

When Doña and I sit before the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, *La Virgen Morena*, *La Morenita*, we are being embraced by the future. We are so different in many basic ways. But we are both children of Guadalupe, and one day we will share in the future that our Lord Jesus Christ has won for us both.



PART THREE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR *LECTIO DIVINA*

I suggest that you use the readings and my reflections as an opportunity for practicing *lectio divina* (“divine reading”). This is an ancient spiritual practice that started with the great monks in the Syrian and Egyptian desert back in the early days of the Church. It is really quite simple.

Step one: calm your mind (my Buddhist friends describe the mind as “a mango-tree full of chattering monkeys”). I find that paying attention to your breath for a few minutes is a practical and effective way to do this.

Step two: read the readings slowly and attentively. Savor the words as if you were tasting a great Pinot Noir. Don’t rush. You are not looking for information or instructions. You are making friends with a sacred text which will bless you abundantly if you will only open your heart to it and let it speak to you. In *lectio divina*, we are not actually “reading” the Bible. Rather, we are “listening” to the Bible as the sacred words speak to us.

Step three: repeat step two.

Step four: read the reflection on the readings.

Step five: Ask yourself a few questions:

- What particular words in the readings call out to me most forcefully?
- What is going on in my life such that these words call to me so forthrightly?
- How am I being asked to change, both interiorly and exteriorly?
- In light of this *lectio divina*, how am I being invited to be of service to the world today?