

Tonantzin- Guadalupe

Our Lady of Guadalupe Sunday, December 11, 2022, 10:00 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena

The Rev. Alfredo Feregrino

**NICAN MOPOHUA, MOTECPANA
IN QUENIN, YANCUICAN, HUEY TLAMAHUSOLTICA
MONEXITI IN CENQUIZCA ICHPOCHTLI
SANCTA MARIA, DIOS INANTZIN
TOCIHUAPILLATOCATZIN,
IN ONCAN TEPEYACAC,
MOTENEHUA GUADALUPE.**

“Here it is told, and set down in order, how a short time ago, in a wonderful way, the Perfect Maiden Holy Mary Mother of God, our Noble Lady, miraculously appeared there on mount Tepeyac, commonly known as Guadalupe.”

With these words written in Nahuatl, the language of “ancient central Mexico”, begins the story of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe that changed the way of conceiving the New World, a story that transforms the paradigm of power over a suffering and defeated people.

A story where a destitute man, a person of humble and lowly condition (*Macehual*) is lifted up and his dignity as a human being is restored.

A story where the Perfect Maiden Holy Mary, comes out to meet this humble and poor man named Juan Diego.

In this encounter, Our Lady introduced herself to this man clearly saying who she is: Please know, be sure, my dearest-and-youngest son, (Our Lady says) that I am the Perfect Ever Holy Mary,

mother of the one great God of truth (*nelli Teotl*),
(mother of) the one who gives us life (*Ilpanemohuani*),
(mother of) the inventor and creator of people (*Teyocayani*),
(mother of) the one who is around and very close to us (*Tloque Nahuaque*),
(mother of) the owner of the sky (*Ilhuicahua*), and the earth (*Tlalticpaque*).

I can only pretend to imagine the reaction and surprise at the moment when Juan Diego is called by his name, and witnesses these beautiful words and the magnificent splendor of the Lady from heaven.

I want to mention one thing that is important to emphasize and that is, that the original manuscript of the oldest narrative of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe according to historians was written in the year 1556.

This manuscript of the apparitions (the Nican Mopohua) was not written in Castilian or Spanish nor in Latin the dominant *lingua franca* during this historical period. The original manuscript was written in Nahuatl language, the language of the Aztec people, the language of ancient central Mexico.

The Nahuatl language is a symbolic language which has meaning beyond words (*disfrasis*). For example, to communicate a profound thought or feeling, it uses a complementary union of two words or symbols which express one meaning.

For example in the Nahuatl language, the Divine Truth is expressed only through **Xochitl** and **Cuicatl**. Which in English means **Flower** and **Song**. The Divine Truth existed only through the sensibility of beauty (in this case the flower) and the poetic (which is the song). Two words, one meaning.

Because flowers were a sign to the Nahuatl people of truth and of the presence of the Divine.

So, this story was not conceived within the Western mentality, this story was conceived in the structure of the Nahuatl thought, the indigenous thought of this land. So, the image and the story is loaded with many symbols which continues to be contextual for this continent.

Every time I read this fascinating story of the appearances, the Nican Mopohua. I always have memories of my childhood.

Every time I read this story, I think of the route that Juan Diego took in his encounter with Our Lady and compare it with a specific memory from I was 8 years old.

I grew up in Mexico City, and live there many, many years ago. My childhood home was five miles from mount Tepeyac where Our Lady encountered Juan Diego. So, I am familiar with the terrain of this area. And by the way, I was baptized at the Basilica of Guadalupe.

According with the story, Our Lady encountered Juan Diego one Saturday morning (on December 9th 1531) on mount Tepeyacand later sent Juan Diego to Tlatelolco- a nearby town- to deliver a message to the Bishop (*Teopixcatlahtoani*- the Governor of the Priests in Nahuatl language).

At that time, the distance from Tepeyac to Tlatelolco required several hours on foot...we have to remember that there were no forms of “public transportation” at that time ... so, I just cannot imagine the challenges of making that journey.

I remembered when my mother took me to the dentist at the same town in Tlatelolco. The distance we traveled was quite long.

We took a bus from my house to Villa de Guadalupe - Tepeyac (a similar route to one that Juan Diego possibly used) then we took another bus to Tlatelolco.

It was far from easy for me as a child given that my destination was to see the dentist, which I was not looking forward to.

And from there we would return to our house the same way using the same buses, basically it took us all day and ... we always returned home very late in the evening.

So, I can resonate with Juan Diego and the distance he traveled to carry out the message given by the Lady from Heaven.

One thing I want to emphasize is that the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe's apparition is commonly known among Latin-Americans and Mexican-Americans theologians as the **Guadalupe event**.

This event can transport us to a place beyond the intellect and give us a totally different perspective taking us to a place barely possible to express with words, a place of flowers and song, where the poetic and the beauty exist. An event of this miracle of God's love.

You know, many events in our history do not have an explanation

Our sacred scriptures are full of events without explanation.

Scriptures are full of events that do not make sense to us, if we approach them using only rational analysis.

Scriptures are full of events in which, visions, dreams, apparitions and divine messengers, reveal a God that communicates in many ways, telling us that God continues speaking and manifesting in specific events in our history.

Yes, God continues speaking in the present.

God continues speaking right here and right now.

The sacred scriptures continue to be written in the here and now.

You know, the image and the story of Our Lady is loaded with many symbols and a surplus of meanings.

God continues giving Godself in love to all peoples regardless of time and place. This is God's self- giving.

Karl Rahner a German Jesuit priest and theologian said that “grace is most fundamentally God’s gift of his very self to human persons in love”

So, Our Lady of Guadalupe (in a way) becomes a symbol of God’s grace, a symbol and manifestation of God’s love and compassion for everyone.

Theologian Jeanette Rodriguez, my former professor of Theology of Liberation at the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University, in her book “*Our Lady of Guadalupe/ Faith and Empowerment among Mexican American Women*”, points out that Our Lady of Guadalupe is a **metaphor of God, yes a metaphor of God** because of the qualities attributed to her (loving, comforting, present and maternal).

Those are all the same qualities of the divine.

This is one of the reasons why Our Lady, the Lady of Heaven, is also known as the feminine face of God or the maternal face of the divine.

A face of God that is loving protective and compassionate, a face of God that embraces us all.

A face of God both powerful and tender, omnipresent and gentle that is for everyone in every land on the planet. A face of God who speaks to our heart not in a mundane language but in the language of song and beauty.

As God continues giving Godself in love to all of us, and through all of us. The divine message in the Guadalupe event is that **God does not abandon us**.

You know, God walks with us, suffers with us and rejoices with us.

God is at work in our lives. Really.

This is God’s promise embodied in this message.

A message where we are invited to trust. Invited to trust in what God has done and will do in our lives.

Invited to trust in God’s presence of love and grace where restoration and renewal are always possible no matter what.

Invited to trust that God is at work in our lives, where a new creation and a new beginning are always possible.

This is what we see in this story...

Juan Diego, a destitute man, a person of humble and lowly condition (*Macehual*) is lifted up and his dignity as a human being is restored.

This text, this Nican Mopohua, begins with the song, the poetic and it finishes with the flowers, (in *Xochitl*, in *Cuicatl*).

This is why the flowers played an important role in the narrative of the Nican Mopohua. Juan Diego upon taking off his cape, the flowers fell to the ground and at that moment, there appeared on the fabric of his cape the precious image of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a sign of the embrace of the feminine presence of God. In a metaphorical way, bringing God's message, bringing the Divine Truth.

The Divine Truth that God is at work in our lives and never abandon us.

The Divine Truth where the Maiden of Heaven, the feminine face of God, the maternal face of the Divine continues giving us her love....

Giving us her love in the language of song and beauty in the language of flowers and song.

Reminding us always as is written in the text of the Nican Mopohua:

Cuix ámo nican nicá nimonantzin?

Am I not here, I, who am your dear mother?

Cuix ámo nocehuallotitlan, nécauhyotitlan in ticá?

Are you not under my shadow and protection?

Cuix ámo néhuatl in nimopaccayeliz?

Am I not the source of your joy?

Cuix ámo nocuixanco nomamalhuazco in ticá?

Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the embrace of my arms?

Cuix oc itlá in motech monequí?

Do you need something more?

Is there anything more that we really need?

AMEN

A note from the preacher: *Because sermons are meant to be preached and therefore prepared with emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.*