

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE
HOLY MASS FOR LATIN AMERICA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*Vatican Basilica
Tuesday, 12 December 2017*

[Multimedia]

The Gospel passage that was just proclaimed is the prelude to two great canticles: that of Mary, known as the "Magnificat", and that of Zechariah, the "Benedictus", which I like to call "the canticle of Elizabeth or of fruitfulness". Thousands of Christians throughout the world begin the day by singing: "Blessed be the Lord" and end it by proclaiming "the greatness of the Lord, for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant". In this way believers of different peoples, day by day, try to remember; to remember that, from generation to generation, God's mercy spreads over all people as he had promised our fathers. And from this context of grateful remembrance bursts forth Elizabeth's song in the form of a question: "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?". We find Elizabeth, the woman marked by the sign of barrenness, who sings under the sign of fruitfulness and astonishment.

I would like to emphasize precisely these two aspects. Elizabeth, marked by barrenness and marked by fruitfulness.

1. *Elizabeth the barren woman*, with all that this implied for the religious mentality of that era, which considered barrenness a divine punishment as a result of her sin or that of her spouse. A mark of shame imprinted on her flesh, either because she felt guilty of a sin that she had not committed or because she felt inadequate, not living up to what was expected of her. Let us imagine for a moment the glances of her family members, of her neighbours, of her own ... a barrenness which thoroughly penetrates and ends up paralyzing one's entire life. A barrenness that can assume many names and forms each time a person physically feels shame in seeing herself stigmatized or feeling inadequate.

We can imagine the same for the Indigenous American Juan Diego when he said to Mary: "I am really just a man of the field, I am a *mecapal* [beast of burden], a *cacaxtli* [back frame], I am a tail, I am a wing; I myself need to be led, to be carried on someone's back; the place to which You are sending me is a place that is unsuited and unfamiliar to me!" (*Nican Mopohua*, n. 55). With this sentiment

one can also find — as the Latin American Bishops have clearly shown us — in our “indigenous and Afro-American communities, which often are not treated with dignity and equality of conditions; many women who are excluded because of their sex, race, or socioeconomic situation; young people who receive a poor education and have no opportunities to advance in their studies or to enter into the labour market so as to move ahead and establish a family; many poor people, unemployed, migrants, displaced, landless peasants, who seek to survive on the informal market; boys and girls subjected to child prostitution, often linked to sex tourism” (*Concluding Document, Aparecida*, n. 65).

2. And, let us contemplate Elizabeth, the barren woman, together with Elizabeth, the *fruitful-astonished woman*. She herself is the first to recognize and bless Mary. It is she who in old age experienced in her own life, in her flesh, the fulfillment of the promise God had made. She who could not have children carried in her womb the Precursor of Salvation. In her we understand that God’s dream is neither barrenness nor to stigmatize or shame his children, but to make flow in them and from them a song of blessing. Likewise we see it in Juan Diego. It was precisely he, and not another, who carried imprinted on his mantle, the *tilma*, the image of the Virgin: the Virgin with a dark complexion and face of mixed race, supported by an angel with the wings of quetzal, pelican and macaw; the mother able to assume the features of her children to make them feel part of her blessing. It would seem that God unceasingly persists in showing us that “the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner” (Ps 118[117]:22).

Dear brothers and sisters, within this dialectic of fruitfulness-barrenness, let us see the richness and cultural diversity of our peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean; it is a sign of the great richness that we are invited not only to cultivate, but also, especially in our time, to courageously defend from every attempt at homogenization which ends by imposing — with attractive slogans — a single way of thinking, of being, of feeling, of living; that ends by rendering pointless and barren what we inherited from our forebears; that results in making people — especially our young people — feel inadequate because they belong to this or that other culture. Ultimately, our fruitfulness demands that we protect our peoples from an ideological colonization that erases what is richest in them, be they indigenous, Afro-American, of mixed race, farmers, or residents of the periphery. “The Mother of God is a type of the Church” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 63) and from her we wish to learn

to be Church with a face of mixed race, indigenous and Afro-American, the face of a farmer, the aspect of a tail, wing, *cacaxtli*. The face of the poor, the unemployed, boy and girl, young and old, so that no one feel barren or unproductive, that no one feel shame or feel inadequate. On the contrary, so that each one, like Elizabeth and Juan Diego, may feel they are the bearer of a promise, of hope, and can say from deep down: “Abba! Father!” (Gal, 4:6)

beginning from the mystery of this sonship which, without erasing the features of each one, universalizes us, making of us a people.

Brothers and sisters, in this climate of grateful remembrance of our being Latin American, let us lift up in our hearts the canticle of Elizabeth, the song of fruitfulness, and let us recite it together with our people so they may never tire of repeating it: Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

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