

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Dear friends in Christ, on Wednesday, December 12, 2018 the universal Church celebrates the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patroness of the Americas. Below is Pope Francis' homily for this feast.

“The Lord, your God, is in your midst ... he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love, he will exult over you with loud singing” (Zeph 3:17).

These words of the prophet Zephaniah, addressed to Israel, may also be referred to our Mother, the Virgin Mary, to the Church, to each one of us, to our souls, all of which God loves with merciful love. Yes, God loves us so much that he even rejoices and takes pleasure in us. He loves us with gratuitous love, limitless love, and expects nothing in return. He does not like Pelagianism. His merciful love is the most striking attribute of God, whose synthesis is condensed in the Gospel message, the faith of the Church.

The word “mercy” [*misericordia*] is composed of two words: misery and heart [*miseria* and *cuore*]. The heart indicates the capacity to love; mercy is that love which embraces the misery of the human person. It is a love that “feels” our poverty as its own, with a view to freeing us of it. “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10). “The Word became flesh” with the intention of sharing all our frailties — with the intention of experiencing our human condition, even unto taking the Cross upon himself, with all the pain of human existence. Such is the depth of his compassion and mercy: self-abasement in order to become a companion at the service of wounded humanity. No sin can erase his merciful closeness or prevent him from outpouring the grace of conversion, provided we invoke it. Indeed, sin itself renders more radiant the love of God who sacrificed his Son to ransom a slave. This mercy of God comes to us with the gift of the Holy Spirit which, in Baptism, enables, generates and nourishes the new life of his disciples. For, howsoever serious and grave the sins of the world may be, the Spirit, who renews the face of the earth, makes possible the miracle of a life that is more human, more full of joy and hope. Let us, too, shout with jubilation: “The Lord is my God and Savior!”

“The Lord is near”, the Apostle Paul tells us, and nothing should perturb us. He is close by. He is not alone but is with his Mother. She said to St Juan Diego: “Why are you afraid? Am I not here who am your Mother?” He is near. He and his Mother. The greatest mercy lies in his being in our midst, in our being in his presence and company. He walks with us, he shows us the path of love, he lifts us up when we fall, and with such tenderness he supports us in our labors, he accompanies us in every circumstance of life. He opens our eyes to see our wretchedness and that of the world, but at the same time he fills us with hope. “The peace of God ... will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7), St Paul tells us. This is the source of our peaceful and happy life; nothing can deprive us of this peace and joy, despite the suffering and trials of life. The Lord gently opens his heart to us, opens us to his love. The Lord is allergic to formality. Let us cultivate this experience of mercy, peace and hope during the journey we are on during Advent and in the light of the Jubilee Year. Proclaiming the Good News to the poor, like John the Baptist, performing works of mercy, is a good way to await Jesus' Birth at Christmas. It is in emulating him, who gave everything, who gave himself. This is his mercy, expecting nothing in return.

In Mary, God rejoices and is especially pleased. In one of the prayers dearest to Christians, the *Salve Regina*, we call Mary “Mother of Mercy.” She has experienced divine mercy and has hosted in her womb the very source of this mercy: Jesus Christ. She, who has always lived intimately united to her Son, knows better than anyone what He wants: that all men be saved, and that God's tenderness and consolation never fail anyone. May Mary, Mother of Mercy, help us to understand how much God loves us.

To Holy Mary we entrust the suffering and joy of the peoples throughout the American Continent, who love her as mother and recognize her as “Patroness” under the beloved title of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

May God bless you in your preparations for his coming,

~ *Father Anthony Ahamefule*