

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 171212b

Tuesday 12.12.2017

Holy Mass for the Liturgical Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Guadalupe

At 18.00 today, Monday of the third week of Advent, in the Vatican Basilica, the Holy Father Francis presided at the Eucharistic Celebration of the Liturgical Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Guadalupe.

The following is the homily the Pope pronounced during the Holy Mass:

Homily of the Holy Father

The Gospel that has just been proclaimed is the preface to two great canticles: the Cantic of Mary known as the “Magnificat” and the Cantic of Zechariah, the “Benedictus”, as I like to call it “the cantic of Elizabeth or fecundity”. Thousands of Christians throughout the world begin the day singing: “Blessed be the Lord” and end the day “proclaiming His greatness because He has looked with kindness on the smallness of His people”. In this way, the believers of different peoples, day by day, seek to keep in mind, to remember that from generation to generation God’s mercy extends over all the people, as He promised our forefathers. And in this context of grateful memory springs the cantic of Elizabeth in the form of a question: “Why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” We find Elizabeth, the woman marked by the sign of barrenness, singing under the sign of fecundity and amazement.

I would like to underline these two aspects. Elizabeth, the woman under the sign of barrenness and under the sign of fertility.

1. Elizabeth, the woman who was sterile, with all that this implied for the religious mentality of her time, who considered her sterility as a divine punishment resulting from her own sin or that of her husband. A sign of shame in her own flesh either because she considers herself guilty of a sin she did not commit or because she felt very small, since she did not live up to what was expected of her. Imagine, for a moment, the looks of your family members, of your neighbours, of yourself ... a barrenness that goes deep and ends up paralyzing all your life. A barrenness that can take many names and forms every time a person feels in his flesh the shame of being stigmatized or feeling unimportant.

We can see it in the little Juan Diego when he says to Maria, “Because I am really (just) a man from the country,

I am a (porter's) rope I am a back-frame, a tail, a wing, a man of no importance: I myself need to be led, carried on someone's back, to that place you are sending me"[1]. This feeling can also be found – as the Latin American bishops made us see – 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”.[2]

2. And next to Elizabeth, the barren woman, we contemplate Elizabeth the *fruitful and astonished* woman. She is the first to recognize and to bless Mary. It is she who in her old age experienced in her own life, in her flesh, the fulfilment of the promise made by God. She who could not have children carried in her womb the precursor of salvation. In her, we understand that the dream of God is not and will not be to make barren or to stigmatize or fill with shame His children, but to make a song of blessing spring within and of them. We see this in Juan Diego too. It was him, and not another, who had in his *tilma* the image of the Virgin: the Virgin with the dark skin and *mestizo* face, supported by an angel with wings of quetzal, pelican and macaw; the mother able to take on the features of her children so as to make them feel part of her blessing.

It seems that again and again God insists on showing us that the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone (see *Ps* 117,22).

Dear brothers, in the midst of this dialectic of fruitfulness-barrenness, let us look at the richness and cultural diversity of our peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, it is a sign of the great wealth that we are invited not only to cultivate but, especially in our time, to courageously defend all attempts at homogenization, that end up imposing – under appealing slogans – a single way of thinking, of being, of feeling, of living, that ends up making invalid or sterile everything inherited from our elders; that ends up making our young people in particular feel that they are nothing because they belong to this or that culture. In summary, our fruitfulness demands that we defend our peoples from an ideological colonization that cancels the richest of them, be they indigenous, African-American, mestizo, peasant, or suburban.

The Mother of God is a figure of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 63) and from her we want to learn to be a Church with a mestizo face, with an indigenous face, African-American, peasant face, “a tail, a wing, of no importance”. A poor face, that of the unemployed, of boys and girls, old and young, so that nobody feels they are barren or fruitless, so that nobody feels embarrassed or insignificant. On the contrary, each person, like Elizabeth and Juan Diego, may feel that they are the bear of promise, of hope, and can say from within, “Abba!”, that is, “Father!” (*Gal*, 4: 6), from the mystery of that affiliation that, without eliminating the features of each person, universalizes us, making us one people.

Brothers, in this atmosphere of grateful memory for our being Latin American, let us sing in our hearts the Canticle of Elizabeth, the song of fruitfulness, and let us say it together with our peoples, who never tire of repeating: Blessed are thou among sinners and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

[1] *Nican Mopohua*, 55.

[2] Cf. *Aparecida*, 65.