

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Dec 12th 2015

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

In spite of having logged countless hours babysitting my seven younger siblings as I grew up, imagine the look of shock on my husband's face when we arrived home with our first newborn baby and I declared, I have no idea what to do! Thank God my dear mother was at our front door the next morning to scoop up our baby son, give us a hug and guide and support our fledgling steps as new parents. Her gentle understanding of our trepidation gave us the confidence we most needed.

What is it about sharing common life experiences with another that touches our hearts? From joys to sorrows and everything in between, there is a surge of solace and relief when someone else says to us, I know, I know. In addition to their spoken words, we are touched by other comforting aspects of our encounter with them including their facial expressions, body language, laughter, stories and tears. All of this binds us together as a voice inside our heart whispers: They know. They really do know. From this connection of trust emerges new strength and resolve.

Today on the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we read in Luke's gospel that when Mary finds out she is pregnant she rushes to her older cousin Elizabeth who is also expecting her first child. Having responded to God's call, Mary likely yearns to see her cousin's face and experience Elizabeth's love.

I like to imagine that Mary anticipated Elizabeth's unconditional acceptance and upon arrival she fell into the arms of her beloved cousin and dear friend. I can picture how they must have shared countless stories, gestures of love and understanding all the while communicating to one another: I know. I know.

Richard Gaillardetz captures these moments in our lives very beautifully when he writes: Embodied presence is vital to authentic interpersonal engagement because it is our embodiment that creates the conditions for both separateness from another and presence to another. When I am bodily present to another, there is an intrinsic vulnerability. 1

Out of this encounter with Elizabeth, emerges the strong and vibrant words of the prophetic Magnificat which Mary proclaims to her cousin demonstrating the depth of her passionate feelings: 'The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn,' preached Dietrich Bonhoeffer... 'It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung....It is a hard, strong, inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords of this world, about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind. These are the tones of the women prophets of the Old Testament that now come to life in Mary's mouth.' 2

Mary's passion was evoked through the solidarity that she shared with Elizabeth. These strong women were carrying two sons who would transform the world. Their time with one another may have laid the foundation for generations to come.

May the encounter of Mary and Elizabeth remind us this Advent to be present in all of our relationships with ourselves, one another and with God. May we hear the voice of God who always whispers, I know, I know.

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