

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Dec 12th 2016

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Both the Second Vatican Council and Pope Francis tell us that the proclamation of our faith has to be inculturated, that faith has to be transmitted in a form that resonates with the local culture. We are spontaneously in resonance with our own culture, but being in resonance with a different culture is not necessarily spontaneous. In-culturation requires on our side some degree of ex-culturation, a distancing of ourselves from the culture we are already familiar with, as my personal experience has taught me. Lack of ex-culturation leads to lack of in-culturation.

The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is clearly an inculturated image depicting an Aztec woman, not a Spanish or European woman. But the name Guadalupe is itself a glaring example of lack of inculturation on the side of the hierarchy in those colonial years. Let me explain. There exists in Spain a centuries old shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe (my own mother's name was Guadalupe) and that was all that bishop Juan de Zumárraga knew. So, when he asked Juan Diego for the name of the Lady that had appeared to him and he heard in the Nautl language the name Coatlxopeuh (translated she crushes the serpent and pronounced Quatlalopeuh), the non-exculturated bishop, who knew only of Spain's Guadalupe, felt a need to "correct" Juan Diego: "you ignoramus, it has to be Guadalupe". And the non-inculturated name sank roots locally and beyond.

God writes straight with lines that to us may look crooked and, when today people hear the name Guadalupe, they think of that Aztec-looking Mary, not of the other less known shrine in the Extremadura region of Spain. This is the inculturated Guadalupe of Mexico and of the Tepeyac hill that we celebrate today as patroness not only of Mexico and Latin America, but in fact as patroness of the entire America, of the entire continent.

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