

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE — THE MATERNITY OF MARY

*"My very dear son, you must know that I am the eternal Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God, Author of Life, Creator of all, and Lord of the Heavens and of the Earth, who is present everywhere, and it is my desire that a church be built here in this place for me, where, as your most merciful Mother and that of all your people, I may show my loving clemency, and the compassion that I bear to the Indians, and to those who love me and seek me and to all those who seek my protection, and call upon me in their travail and afflictions, and where I may hear their sorrows and prayers and give them consolation and help."*¹

THIS IS WHAT OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE told Juan Diego, a converted Indian, in her first apparition to him long ago, on December 9th, 1531; it was only a few years after Christopher Columbus (whose name means "The Christ-bearing dove") had discovered the new continent. By this time you must all know about the miraculous portrait of herself which Our Lady caused to be made on Juan Diego's tilma, and by which she proved the truth of her words. What I would like to do here is to consider with you something of what her words mean — for ourselves.

The first thing we must understand is that those words were not spoken to Juan Diego alone; as the words themselves show, they were intended to come through him to you and to me, just like those wonderful three words which Jesus spoke to another John from the Cross:

Behold thy mother! (John 19:27)

"Behold thy mother!" . . . And in fact what is the meaning of Our Lady of Guadalupe if it is not Jesus, still saying to us, across continents and across the centuries: "Behold thy mother!"? The very name of the person to whom Our Lady appeared was John (Juan); the "Diego," significantly too, is the Spanish for James, and James was the brother of John — "Juan Diego," the John who is the brother of that first John to whom Jesus said: "Behold thy mother!" and who, like that first John, represents all the little brothers and sisters of Jesus Himself, all the little children of Mary.

¹ The Dark Virgin by Donald Demarest and Coley Taylor, p. 101.

And so, if we are to understand Our Lady of Guadalupe, we must not think of her as some strange apparition to an obscure Mexican that happened way back; we must hear the plea of Jesus from the Cross asking us to behold His mother.

Notice, Jesus did not say, "Behold My mother!" Everyone knew she was *His* mother. What had to be understood, what still has to be understood, is that Mary is our Mother too — that the very person who is the Mother of God is *our* Mother.

And that is why, I am sure, that Our Lady of Guadalupe told Juan Diego in their very first meeting that she was the Mother of Jesus, "Mother of the true God," and our Mother. Behold in Our Lady of Guadalupe the Mother of God who is *your* Mother! For if you want to understand her words, you must realize first who it is that is speaking to you.

What she says is simple, so simple in fact, so terribly simple, that we are very apt not to see how wonderful it is. I am going to try to explain it a little, but first there is something that I must ask you to do. When you try to explain things like this, which have to do with our personal relation to God, you realize that what has to be done is not yours to do. Paul must have been thinking of that when he wrote:

I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase. Therefore, neither he that plants is anything, nor he that waters; but God that gives the increase. (1 Cor. 3:6-7)

And that is the way it always is. If there is anything to be brought forth, Christ brings it forth whenever two or more are gathered together in His Name. That is why I must ask you at this point, not merely to read what I am about to say, but to ask Jesus and Mary to move you to understand what They would want you to understand. Because what I am going to say has to do with the great and adorable Mystery of God's Love, the Mystery of Mary's Motherhood. To understand it, as much as a Mystery of God can be understood by us, is so great a grace that St. Louis DeMontfort does not hesitate to address as "Predestinate soul" those whom divine Providence had brought to read his "Secret of Mary." Since, then, God is the Author of grace, and not our feeble understanding, we must, if we are to gain the grace of truly supernatural understanding, turn to God and not merely to men for instruction, regarding human words as the mere instruments of God's teaching.

What I would ask you to reflect on, then, is this: that Our Lady of Guadalupe doesn't merely *say* that she is our Mother. *Her words are*

the words of a mother; she acts as a true mother, a perfect mother, always acts. For observe, she doesn't tell us how evil we are; a mother can only see the *goodness* of her child. She doesn't threaten us unless we change; mothers don't threaten, they console. She doesn't ask us to make great sacrifices; mothers are the ones who make sacrifices for their children: they don't ask their children to make sacrifices for them. She doesn't ask us to reform our ways; a mother loves her child *just the way he or she is*. Our Lady of Guadalupe, you can see, is only a loving mother who wants to console her children. She asks for nothing for herself, only for her children to pour out their little hearts to her, to come to her with their trouble:

to all those who love me and ask me;

but then, notice, lest those who do not love her very much, and who know it, be driven away by that misgiving, she quickly adds:

and to all those who seek my protection, and call upon me in their travail and afflictions.

It is so wonderful and so simple. Everything about Our Lady of Guadalupe bears the authentic mark of a mother's love: she wants only to listen to our weeping, to weep with us, to console us, in all our sorrows and sufferings. And all the time this Mother, who is just a mother, who is all compassion, who wants nothing but to console us, is not merely *our* Mother, she is the Mother of God!

I am the eternal Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God.

This, then, is Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Mother of God, our very own Mother; and the one thing she wants is for us to come to her with all our troubles, our worries and our burdens, great and small.

But we have only scratched the surface of this overwhelming maternal love. Listen to what she tells us:

I hear your weeping, and I weep with you — as I wept with the sufferings of my firstborn, and all that I could not do for Him, I must do for you.

They have made me the keeper in the vineyards: my vineyard I have not kept. (Cant. 1:5)

They have made me the keeper in the vineyards of the little ones, the brothers and sisters of Jesus, my children. My vineyard, my Jesus, my First-born, they have taken away from me. Now listen to what my Son tells me: My mother, if you do not know where I am, that I am in your children,

go forth, and follow after the steps of the flocks, and feed thy kids beside the tents of the shepherds. (Cant. 1:7)

There you will find Me, in them: love Me in them, feed Me in them, O fairest of women, My Mother!

I am the mother of fair love, and of fear and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue. Come over to me, all you that desire me, and be filled with my fruits . . ." (Eccles. 24: 24-26)

Come to me! I listen when you tell me where it hurts, and what you need. I am all Mother. In me there is nothing vindictive, no bitterness. You are my child and I am your Mother, and that is everything—everything! You must not feel that you have to be "pious" to come to me, that you have to be different from what you are, that what you are and what you suffer are not, somehow, acceptable. What is lovable to me is just what you are, just those sufferings of your heart of which you are strangely ashamed. Did you ever know a mother who thought the tears of her little child were beneath her? And even if such a mother could be found among you, I am not such a Mother. But perhaps you have discovered that what your mother gave you when you were a child, her loving compassion, you no longer receive from her. Perhaps it has occurred to you that now, when you need a mother's love more than when you were a child, you no longer have it. Ah! my little one, you are my child, my baby! Try to understand: I am your Mother, a mother who is taking care of you for a heavenly Father—and to Him and to me you are the tiniest babe.

Come to me, then, with your troubles and your grief! Are you a young man hopelessly in love with a girl who doesn't return your affection? Come and tell me! I know, better than you will ever realize, what it is to love and not to be loved in return. Who could console you better than I in that desolation? Are you a young woman who would want to marry and be the mother of a happy family? Then who knows better than myself what it is to long for loving children? Come to me, then, put your little head on my breast and weep, and I will weep with you. All the great things that God wants you to do, to do to you, will be possible only in this way; you must know that I who am the Queen of the Universe and the Mother of God, am your Mother; that I love you with a compassionate tenderness, a tenderness which would break your heart if only you could understand it, if you could know what I have suffered for you, only to bring you the peace and joy of my ma-

ternal love! But you are too little to understand that yet. Only come to me!

Are you a loving parent whose heart is torn by anxiety, worrying about the welfare of your son, your daughter? Then who knows better than myself the suffering of a mother's heart, the anxiety of a parent for a child's happiness? Then come to me! Though you are a parent weighed down by the burdens of human responsibility, to me you are the tiniest of little babies. I know very well what you fear and are scarcely able to tell yourself. I know everything, and I love you. Only come to me!

Are you, perhaps, disturbed by your sins? Is your conscience troubled to think that you are unworthy of the confidence people place in you, that you are especially unworthy of the love of God and His Mother? Oh, my little one, if you could know how that thought pierces my Heart with sadness! Please promise, you must promise, never to think that about Us again! You fear to offend me by your concupiscence, by your anger, and then you break my Immaculate Heart by distrusting Its love for you! Please, you must understand that my whole being is love for you! Can you understand that? I know you are too little, but a mother tells her child everything. *You* are my little baby-Jesus, my little Jesus! Do you understand what that means? That your sinful self does not exist in my love, in my love you are all pure, like Jesus Himself, in my love you are Jesus; what I love is the you that my Jesus died for to make you Himself. I love Him in you and you in Him; in me you *are* Jesus. You are not loved for anything you have achieved; all that you will achieve will be the fruit of this love; all that is lovable in you, all that you yourself love and want to be loved is Jesus, and that is all that I see in you, all that you are in me.

Behold your Mother!

Do you understand? I know you cannot understand but I am your Mother and I must tell you everything. I am truly your Mother, your very own, dear, tender, loving mother; and I love you *now*, not for anything you will accomplish, spiritually or otherwise. Whatever you accomplish can only come from my love. I love you for what you are right now, with all your sins, your misery, your weakness, your shameful lust, your uncontrollable anger, your smallnesses that make you blush to think of them, But do think of them, of all the things you are most ashamed of in yourself, things you scarcely can think of, that you scarcely remember, they are so painful, and then realize that in my love of you I not only see all those things, they are the very helplessness of my child that draws my love to it.

Do you know why? Do you know how I see your sins? I see them in Jesus, in my Jesus hanging on the Cross, shamed like you, naked, humiliated, beaten, broken. Now listen to His words:

Eli, Eli, lamma sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46)

Those words pierced my heart — I know that my Son felt Himself forsaken in the depths of His soul, by His Father and by me. Then perhaps you can see how I would love you, that I would want you to know in the depths of your heart the love which Jesus did not know, which He willed not to know that you might know it. Does that help you to see how I would love you, how my love for you is my love for Jesus? That you are Jesus to me? If only you could know that when you come to me in your shame, in your humiliations, your brokenness, in all your pathetic misery, that I welcome you with a tremendous incomprehensible joy into my maternal arms; that you are my little Jesus for whom I have been longing all through the ages, for whom I have been waiting so long!

But, my little children, you do not understand my love, and you do not understand yourselves. If you understood yourselves, you would know that deep, deep down within you, the one thing that you want — more than anything else in the whole world — is to be loved, to be accepted, just the way you are, to be a little baby once again in your mother's arms. Maybe at times you have dreamed of this, half hoping that it would be possible, and then you were awakened by the alarm of cruel reality, or so you thought, a reality which tells you that those blissful days of your infancy and childhood are gone forever. But that is not true! They are not gone! A child outgrows its natural mother, true, but my children never outgrow Me! I shall be your Mother for all eternity.

*I am the eternal Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God —
and your Mother. I am your Mother forever!*

*We will be glad and rejoice in thee, remembering thy breasts
more than wine. (Cant. 1:3)*

Yes, you will be glad in heaven, but you will be glad in Me, for I am the heavenly Jerusalem in whom are all the Elect. In heaven you will remember and understand the grace that came to you through my love; even as a child is nourished by the breasts of its mother, so you will understand in heaven how you were loved and nourished by me.

I am the mother of fair love.

In heaven you will understand my love for you, there you will know how through it you grew, in me, to the age of Jesus. There you will understand the words which I speak in the Canticle:

*Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples:
because I languish with love. (Cant. 2:5)*

I languish with the love of my Son, and only you, the flowers and fruits of His Love, can console me, because you are in Him and He is in you, and you are one with Him. But no matter now; you are too young to understand, but you are not too young to love me, to allow me to love you. You are my little child, and when a child is very young, it is too small to understand the love of its mother; it has to receive her love first, to enjoy her, to be nurtured and cared for by her. Later on you will understand. It is the very love of the mother that brings her child to mature understanding; and so all I want now is for you to come over to me, to have no misgivings.

*Our sister is little, and hath no breasts. What shall we do in
the day when she is to be spoken to?" (Cant. 8:8)*

You are that little sister, you are too young yet to understand and to nourish others with the breasts of your understanding. You must be loved first; that is the way a child learns to love, and in your love you will understand and become a mother as I am a Mother.

My child, do you know that more than anything else in the world you want to be loved? It is true, my little child, truer than ever you dreamed. And not only is it true that your need for love is the deepest thing about you, but it is by God that you want to be loved. You want to feel that the One Who loves you is

*the True God, Author of Life, Creator of all, and Lord of the
Heavens and of the Earth, Who is present everywhere,*

He who is my Son.

What you would want, if only you could know it, is to know that this God loves you, and that He accepts you — just the way you are, with all your weaknesses — because deep inside of you, too, you know that your weakness, your wretchedness, is too much for yourself alone. That is why you are so miserable and unhappy, why you need so many things to distract you from yourself. That, too, is why you seek merely human love, even illicit love sometimes, to console yourself, to prove to yourself that you are lovable, when all the time you know, at the bottom of your heart, that you are not lovable. Yes, it is all too true, outside of Jesus and myself there is nothing lovable in you, and yet you are seeking all the time to prove that there is, even though you

know deep within yourself that it is not true. Why do you do this, my child? It's only because you are so ignorant of my love for you, and of your heavenly Father's love for you in me, because you do not know that you are our child. Did you know that Juan Diego was 55 years old when I appeared to him? Not exactly a child by any natural measure! Yet how did I address him? I called to him: "*Juan Diego, my son, whom I love tenderly, like a little and delicate child, where are you going?*" Juan Diego, in whom I see all my little children, whom I love with all the tenderness of a mother for her only one, as I see him pathetically going about carrying the heavy burden of his human responsibility, so frail, so helpless against all his enemies, far, far more helpless than a newborn babe in its little crib! Think! What is it that touches the maternal heart more than the pathetic helplessness of her little child? Then think of my Heart, my Immaculate Heart — I am the Mother of God — and think how that Heart must be touched by your helplessness, by all your fears, all the fears you are afraid even to express to yourself, so that you do not so much as know what it is you fear. Do you want to know what it is you fear? You fear the evil in yourself. You fear what in your heart of hearts you know you would be capable of; you fear the monster which lurks within every child of Eve except my Son and myself. And that is what keeps you from the One Being Whose Love you want, God, your heavenly Father. So much is this true that you can hardly begin to realize how much you want His Love.

That is the way of the human heart; it does not allow the mind to rest on that which it so much wants but fears it will never obtain. And the Evil One is not slow to exploit that, to keep your unworthiness before you, if possible to convince you that you are all evil, made to his own image and likeness.

And so, when you begin to say that wonderful prayer which my Son taught you, *Our Father who art in heaven*, you experience no sense of warmth, of filial tenderness, your heart is all cold, contracted by its misgivings and fears. This Father, Whose Love is more maternal than a mother's love, who rejoices eternally in the communication of His Whole Being to His Son, My Son, this heavenly Father who would draw you up to Himself in His Love for all eternity. Did you know what it was that promoted Him to conceive me? It was His infinite desire to show His more than mother's love for you, to overwhelm you with His blind affection for you, His poor little child, all lost and afraid. I, THE MOTHER OF GOD AND YOUR MOTHER, AM THE INCARNATION OF THAT FATHER'S LOVE FOR YOU. This Father Who is in Himself so Maternal that He begets a Son of Himself — because He is at once Mother and Father in the tenderness of His Love—this heavenly Father has

conceived me to manifest His Love, so that you might say *Our Father who art in heaven*, and weep in His arms, the prodigal child who knows through his sins how much he is loved, that this Father Whom he has deserted, and Whom alone he wants now, loves him — loves him not merely as He loved him before, but in a certain sense more, because he needs to be loved more. O my little child, if only you could know how much you are loved by your heavenly Father, by my Son, by the Holy Spirit Who is Love Itself — and by me! If only you could know that it is the very misery in yourself which you fear that draws Us to you! Then perhaps you would realize how much you could love the Father, because then you would not be afraid of your sins which the Enemy, like a vicious blackmailer, uses to keep you from the Father, by which he tempts you to hide yourself from yourself, and from the Father.

I am your Lady of Guadalupe.

*Hear, my son, what I now say to thee: let nothing trouble or afflict thee. Fear neither pain nor sickness nor other grievous accident. Am I not here, I who am thy Mother? Thou art beneath my shadow and protection. And am I not life and health? In my lap art thou, and counted as mine. What more dost thou need?"*²

Behold I will bring upon her as it were a river of peace, and as an overflowing torrent the glory of the Gentiles which you shall suck; you shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees they shall caress you. As one whom the mother caresses, so will I comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. (Isaias 66: 11—13)

And now I must bring you back to the very beginning of what I have told you, to the words which Our Lady of Guadalupe spoke to Juan Diego. Because there is just one thing, one little thing, that Our Lady wants you to do, and that is the whole reason for her apparition to Juan Diego, and it is the only reason for what I have written. You will notice in her words to Juan Diego which we quoted at the very beginning of this reflection, that Our Lady of Guadalupe wants only for us to realize that she is our Mother. But why? Because a mother can help her child only if it cries out to her. How does *any* mother know that her baby needs help? Because when it is in pain or disturbed, it cries out. And so, too, Our Lady of Guadalupe cannot help us unless we cry out to her in our distress. She tells Juan Diego that she wants to show

² *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, by Rev. George Lee, G.S.Sp., pp. 144-145.

her loving compassion, but to whom? Not merely to the Indians, not merely, even, "to those who love me and seek me." She is afraid lest she frighten her children away if she requires them to love her; as if she were saying: "I do not require you to be devoted to me, I do not require you to love me: just cry out to me in your sufferings!" And so she adds, in her words to Juan Diego: "and to all those who seek my protection, and call upon me in their travail and afflictions." This, then, is the whole purpose of Our Lady's coming, that we seek her protection, calling upon her in all our miseries. But Lady knows that a child only learns to love its mother by being loved first by her. There is only one thing, then, that Our Lady wants us to do, to cry out to her, to call her by her name, Mary!

Thy name is as oil poured out. (Cant. 1:2)

Oil is a symbol of what comforts and heals. But the oil which remains enclosed in the bottle is of no use. And therefore Mary's name is not merely as oil, but as oil poured out, the oil actually poured on the wound. But this pouring out is in our hands: every time we say the name of Mary, the grace of her love is poured out on the wounds of our sins and our sufferings.