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"When there are difficulties, we go to our Mother"

In his 23 August general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on apostolic zeal, speaking about Saint Juan Diego.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In our journey of rediscovering the passion for proclaiming the Gospel, that apostolic zeal; seeing how this

passion to proclaim the Gospel has developed in the history of the Church; on this path, we look today to the Americas, where evangelisation has an ever vital source: Guadalupe – the Mexicans are happy. Of course, the Gospel had already reached there prior to those apparitions, but unfortunately it had also been accompanied by worldly interests. Instead of the path of inculturation, too often the hasty approach of transplanting and imposing pre-constituted models – European, for instance – had been taken, lacking respect for the indigenous peoples.

The Virgin of Guadalupe, on the other hand, appears dressed in the clothing of the indigenous, native peoples, she speaks their language, she welcomes and loves the local culture: Mary is Mother, and under her mantle every child finds a place. In Mary, God became flesh and,

through Mary, He continues to incarnate Himself in the lives of peoples.

Our Lady, in fact, proclaims God in the most suitable language; that is, the mother tongue. And Our Lady, too, speaks to us in the mother tongue, the language we understand well. The Gospel is transmitted through the mother tongue. And I would like to say thank you to the many mothers and and so many grandmothers who pass the Gospel on to their children and grandchildren: faith is passed on with life; this is why mothers and grandmothers are the first evangelizers. [Let's give] a round of applause for mothers and grandmothers! And it is communicated, as Mary shows, in simplicity: Our Lady always chooses those who are simple, on the hill of Tepeyac in Mexico, as at Lourdes and Fatima: speaking to them, she speaks

to everyone, in a language suitable for all, in understandable language, like that of Jesus.

Let us dwell then on the testimony of Saint Juan Diego, who is the messenger; he is the young man, he is the indigenous man who received the revelation of Mary: the messenger of Our Lady of Guadalupe. He was a simple person, an *indio* of the people: God, who loves to perform miracles through the little ones, had rested his gaze on him.

Juan Diego was already a married adult when he embraced the faith. In December 1531, he was about 55 years old. While walking along, he saw the on a hill the Mother of God, who tenderly called out to him. And what does Our Lady call him? “My most beloved little child Juanito” (*Nican Mopohua*, 23), taken from the name Juan. Then she sent him to the

Bishop to ask him to build a church there where she had appeared.

Juan Diego, simple and willing, went with the generosity of his pure heart, but had to wait a long time. He finally spoke to the Bishop, who did not believe him. And so often, we bishops [are like this], so often… He met Our Lady again, who consoled him and asked him to try again. The *indio* returned to the Bishop and with great difficulty met him, but the Bishop, after listening to him, dismissed him and sent men to follow him. Here is the difficulty, the trial of proclamation: despite zeal, the unexpected arrives, sometimes from the Church itself. To proclaim, in fact, it is not enough to bear witness to the good, it is necessary to know how to endure evil. Let's not forget this: it is very important to proclaim the Gospel, not just by bearing witness to the good, but also by bearing with evil. A Christian does

good, but also endures evil. Both go together; life is like that.

Even today, in so many places, inculturating the Gospel and evangelising cultures requires constancy and patience, not being afraid of conflict, not losing heart. I am thinking of a country where Christians are persecuted, because they are Christians, and they can't practice their faith easily and in peace. Juan Diego, discouraged because the bishop sent him away, asked Our Lady to dispense him and appoint someone more respected and more capable than him, but was invited to persevere. There is always the risk of a type of surrender in the proclamation: something doesn't go right and one backs down, becoming discouraged and perhaps taking refuge in one's own certainties, in small groups, and in some personal devotions. Our Lady, on the other hand, while she consoles us, makes

us go forward and thus allows us to grow, like a good mother who, while following her son's steps, launches him into the world's challenges.

Thus encouraged, Juan Diego returned to the Bishop, who asked him for a sign. Our Lady promises Juan one, and comforts him with these words: "Let nothing frighten you, let nothing trouble your heart: [...] Am I not here, I who am your mother?" This is beautiful. Often times when we are in desolation, in sadness, in difficulty, Our Lady say this to us, too, in our hearts: Am I, your mother, not here? [She is] always close by us to console us and give us the strength to go on.

Then she asked him to go to the arid hilltop to pick flowers. It was winter, but, nevertheless, Juan Diego found some beautiful flowers, put them in his cloak and offered them to the Mother of God, who invited him to

take them to the Bishop as proof. He goes, waits his turn patiently and finally, in the presence of the Bishop, opened his *tilma* – which is what the indigenous used to cover themselves – he opened his *tilma* to show the flowers—and behold! The image of Our Lady appeared the fabric of the cloak, the extraordinary and living image that we are familiar with, in whose eyes the protagonists of that time are still imprinted. This is God's surprise: when there is willingness and when there is obedience, He can accomplish something unexpected, in the time and in ways we cannot foresee. And so, the shrine requested by the Virgin was built, and even today one can visit it.

Juan Diego left everything and, with the Bishop's permission, dedicated his life to the shrine. He welcomed pilgrims and evangelised them. This is what happens in Marian shrines, pilgrimage destinations, and places

of proclamation, where everyone feels at home – because it is the house of their mamma, the house of their mother – and experiences nostalgia for home, that is, the longing for the place where you find the Mother, Heaven. Faith is welcomed in these places in a simple way, the faith is welcomed in a genuine way, in a popular way. And as she told Juan Diego, Our Lady listens to our cries and heals our sorrows (cf. *ibid*., 32). We should learn this: when there are difficulties in life, we go to our Mother; and when life is happy, we also go to our Mother to share these things. We need to go to these oases of consolation and mercy, where faith is expressed in a maternal language; where we lay down the labours of life in Our Lady's arms and return to life with peace in our hearts, perhaps with the peace of little children.

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