

ISAIAH 40:1-11
MARK 1:1-11

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MEDITATION ON MEXICO MISSION EDUCATION TRIP
(To think, to act, to evaluate)

Speaker #1: It amazing to see Mexico City from the air! It just goes on and on and on -- one of the largest cities in the world -- 3 times the size of New York!

Speaker #2: It's a city with extremes of poverty and wealth; a city with 1 & ½ MILLION street vendors; a city where 12 million people live 6 and ½ people per ROOM; a city with an overabundance toilet paper, but where 4 million people don't even have a toilet.

Speaker #1: I was sure happy to see the *Sisters of Guadalupe* waiting for us at the airport and a nice meal waiting for us at the convent.

Speaker #2: The three worship services each day seemed a little strange and awkward at first, maybe because of the language difference, though most of each service was translated into English. At one of our first services, we were all moved by a reading called, *I Have a Dream*.

Speaker #1: I couldn't help but think about our own church when I heard it. It sums up MY hopes and dreams for OUR church.

Speaker #3: I HAVE A DREAM

I dream of a Christian community where everybody helps everybody else. Where everybody is needed and everybody is irreplaceable.

I dream of a Christian community where everybody has a place: the sick and the healthy, the strong and the weak, the youth and the adults, the children and the elderly, the indecisive and those who make up their minds, and those who are tired and live with resignation.

I dream of a Christian community where everybody speaks with everybody else, where conflicts are dealt with in respect and love, where those who get discouraged find open ears, where those who are sad find consolation, and those who live alone find friends.

I dream of a Christian Community where people have a real enthusiasm for Jesus' message, where the Gospel is announced in a way that is really livable, where they truly live the Gospel and teach each other how to live it.

I dream of a Christian Community where the Liturgy is a feast for everyone, where everyone finds the strength to live every day.

I believe in this dream. It helps me to commit myself to my community, so that it may become a community of communities, where the Spirit of Jesus is present and active.

Lord Jesus, allow my dream to become each time closer to Your dream, to Your utopia.

Allow us to be Your hands and feet, heart and mind,

A body bringing about YOUR own dream.

May we all build up YOUR Reign. Amen!

Speaker #1: What a wonderful dream for OUR church, or ANY church! It's what a church is SUPPOSED to be, isn't it?

Speaker #4: For me, the highlight of our 24 hours in Mexico City was learning the story of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, and visiting her cathedral and shrine. No matter what one thinks about the historicity, or factuality, of the Virgin Mary appearing in indigenous FORM to a simple indigenous MAN named Juan

Diego, it cannot be denied that that ONE event stands as the defining moment, the defining story, around which the entire nation of Mexico has been BUILT and unified. We didn't enter a single home where we did NOT see a picture or statue of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*. Whatever that event WAS in reality, it had the MIRACULOUS power to bring together 2 antagonistic cultures, with 2 competing worldviews, and make them ONE.

Speaker #5: The MIRACLE of *Our Lady of Guadalupe* reminds me of the last few lines of our Scripture Lesson, which is a prophecy of God's Messiah, where *God comes with a strong arm to feed God's flock and gather God's lambs into divine ARMS and CARRY them in God's BOSOM*.

Speaker #1: Most of our time was spent in the *City of Eternal Spring*, Cuernavaca, where the flowers are glorious, and EVERYWHERE. We arrived just in time for Mexico's BIGGEST holiday of the year, even bigger than Christmas.

Speaker #4: It's called *The Day of the Dead*. It happens on *All Saints' Day*, when grieving Mexicans welcome back the spirits of those who have recently died with home altars lavished with all the favorite things of the deceased: favorite food and drink, music and flowers, pictures and candles and clothing, all piled high around a bed of welcome. And for an entire night, friends, fellow villagers, and even a few tourists walk from house to house to gather with those who grieve and share their hospitality of food and drink, laughter and even a little tequila.

Speaker #5: Then, the following day, *All Soul's Day*, the entire village meets in the cemetery, to decorate EVERY grave with flowers, candles and pictures. They come with wheelbarrows and armloads of marigolds, many dressed in their best clothing, to sit around the graves of their loved ones and tell stories as a brass band and mariachi bands play in the background and fireworks are released, until finally the priest begins a mass, a special mass for the souls of the dead.

Speaker #6: There was a RHYTHM to our days in Cuernavaca. We worshipped, ate meals and cleaned-up with the Sisters. We enjoyed lectures by university professors, missionaries, and the poor working in cooperatives with each other to raise their own and their community's standard of living. We hiked into the hills to a sacred site for the ancient Mayans, and there, we shared a timeless Mayan ritual. We studied the Bible with a *Christian Base Community* and toured the palace of Cortez, where we were moved by the murals of Diego Rivera. We visited schools for poor children and traveled to neighborhoods where we dialogued with just a few of the 70% of the Mexican people who live on less than \$4/day. We didn't SEE the POOREST of the poor, but what we SAW was heart-wrenching enough. In the evening, we needed our time for debriefing.

Speaker #3: And in the midst of it all, the Sisters CHALLENGED us, and challenged our FAITH, with a reading entitled, *This Jesus Challenges Me*.

Speaker #2: THIS JESUS CHALLENGES ME

I use force and He says, "Forgive".

I am afraid and He says, "Take heart".

I doubt and He says, "Trust".

I feel anguish and He says, "Be calm".

I prefer to be alone and He says, "Come follow me".

I make plans and He says, "Let go".

I want security and He says to me, "I promise nothing".

I want to live and He says to me, "Give your life".

*I believe that I am good and He says, "That's not enough".
 I want to be in charge, to give commands, and He says, "Serve, obey".
 I want to understand, and He says, "Believe".
 I want clarity and He speaks to me in parables.
 I want poetry and He speaks of realities.
 I want tranquility and He wants me to be disturbed.
 I want revenge and He says, "Turn the other cheek".
 I want peace and He says, "I have come to bring the sword".
 I want to hide and He says, "Let your light shine".
 I look for first place and He says, "Sit in the last".
 I want to be seen, and He says, "Pray in secret".
 No I don't understand this Jesus. He provokes me, He confounds me.
 Like so many of His disciples, I too would like to follow another teacher who
 would be more clear and would exact less of me. But it is the same for me as it
 was for Peter.... I don't know of anyone else who has the words of eternal life.*

Speaker #5: In the *Christian Base Community* we attended, we talked about the issues of the day in light of that week's lectionary readings from scripture. Well, today's readings talk about preparing the WAY for God's Messiah, for God's Kingdom. And IF the way is through our HEARTS, and through preparing ROOM in our hearts, then our EXPERIENCES in Mexico, our EXPERIENCES with the poor and those who work with them, were like encountering John the Baptist. And IN those encounters, our HEARTS were TOUCHED and MOVED and CHANGED! And maybe THEIR hearts were CHANGED a little ALSO. I'm thinking of the woman, a chronic VICTIM of domestic VIOLENCE and abuse, whose TEARS began to pour OUT as Gordon anointed her forehead with oil and asked God to BLESS her. But MOSTLY, it was our OWN hearts that CHANGED. And we realize NOW that we were preparing ROOM in our hearts for GOD, GOD'S values, and GOD'S kingdom.

Speaker # 6: For it was NOT a mission trip to help a few rich North Americans feel GOOD about themselves because they did a few good deeds for those less fortunate. In fact, we heard from one North American, who now lives a SIMPLE life in rural Mexico, that such trips are NOT very helpful for EITHER the giver OR the receiver. Instead, WE went to Mexico to LEARN from the poor and those who serve them about JESUS and our FAITH, because we know that JESUS was poor. WE went to Mexico to understand what Bishop Sergio Mendez Arceo MEANT when he translated the FIRST Beatitude of Jesus to read: *Blessed are those who have the Spirit of the POOR*. Yes, WE went to Mexico to LEARN, and to grow in our OWN faith. WE went to Mexico for US, even MORE than for those we visited.

Speaker #3: BUT, we did SERVE the poor a little -- by enjoying their company, LEARNING from them, and spending our money on the crafts they'd made. But it wasn't MUCH when we consider that so MANY of them have been sending members of their family to WORK in the United States, so that they might send MONEY back HOME to Mexico to help their family SURVIVE. And for the most part, we realized that those workers don't want to BE in the United States, but back HOME with FAMILY – if ONLY they could make a LIVING in Mexico. No, we didn't do MUCH for those we visited. And soon we realized that our trip was NOT about what we could GIVE, but about what we would RECEIVE.

Speaker #4: A *Christian Base Community* is a SMALL group of SIMPLE people, who MEET weekly to share the Bible (and life) together. Well, toward the END of our time with the *Christian Base*

Community we visited, they ASKED us what tangible ACTION each of us would take as a result of our time in their community. Well, even though we live a different LIFESTYLE in a different LAND, we all thought of various WAYS, simple ways, that we could stand in SOLIDARITY with these sisters and brothers in Christ, who are working so HARD to be faithful and who had touched OUR lives so deeply. But we learned ALSO that it's not so much our ACTIONS as our continuing SOLIDARITY with them that MATTERS.

SPEAKER #5: According to Bishop Leonidas Proano, THIS is **SOLIDARITY**:

To always maintain attentive ears to the cry of pain of others,
AND their request for help... is **solidarity**.

To always maintain an alert gaze and eyes spread out over the sea,
looking for some shipwrecked person in danger... is **solidarity**.

To feel the suffering of your brother as your OWN,
AND to make the anguish of the poor your OWN... is **solidarity**.

To be the voice of the humble, to discover injustice and evil,
to denounce the unjust and the evildoer... is **solidarity**.

To let yourself be carried away by a message full of hope, love and peace,
including shaking a brother's hand... is **solidarity**.

To become yourself the messenger of a sincere and fraternal embrace
that one people sends to another... is **solidarity**.

To share the dangers in the struggle to live in justice and liberty,
risking in love even your life... is **solidarity**.

To be devoted to love is the greatest proof of friendship:
to live and die with Jesus Christ... is **solidarity**.

Speaker #1: Yes, we promised to continue to be in **solidarity** with our Mexican friends and ALL people EVERYWHERE who struggle with life. And we will DO that, remembering the signs of HOPE that we witnessed: happy children eating healthy meals, brushing their teeth, having music lessons, learning computer skills, and having homework help, all through the work of *VAMOS* and *Every Dollar Feeds Kids*; cooperatives of workers assisting one another in achieving a better life by working together; thousands of *Christian Base Communities* enabling people to hold their faith in God at the forefront of their daily living; and multitudes of organizations in Mexico, ALL working for change, both in Mexico and around the globe, in order to HELP the POOR have a SHARE in the world's abundance.

Speaker #3: And AS we ended our session, before we celebrated with refreshments and fellowship, we were challenged to EVALUATE our meeting, because constant evaluation is important! AS our Mayan spiritual guide, NACHO, would soon TEACH us: we need to evaluate our daily actions and lives. Certain things happen to us, but it's what we DO with them that matters. And with daily awareness, and trying to live EACH day fully EVEN as we process the events of our past, we can slowly but surely make the changes we need to make in our daily living. Even the tiniest steps eventually lead to SIGNIFICANT action and change.

Speaker #2: It's DIFFICULT to share our experiences and learnings now that we're HOME. It's an encounter that NEEDS to be experienced. But we CAN tell you that it CHANGED us. Like John the Baptist, those we MET in Mexico have PREPARED in our hearts for God, for Emmanuel. Amen.