

27 th Sunday

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10-05-08

I bring to you today greetings from an elderly Mexican woman named Esperanza. She lives on a hill on the edge of Juarez. Her house--her entire home--is one room. It holds a refrigerator, two stoves (one of them used for storage), a radio, a small TV, a table, two chairs, a bed, and some boxes. No shower, no sink, no toilet, no telephone, of course. I guessed Esperanza's entire home to be 10x12. Esperanza lives in a dangerous area, but two things keep her safe: a scrawny black dog who barks regularly...and a crucifix on one of her four walls. A guard dog and Jesus--in drug-infested Juarez.

Today, Esperanza will walk to the nearest Catholic parish for Mass, perhaps bringing a few pesos as her offering to Jesus. Every weekend, her priest celebrates five Masses. Like us, she will hear from Paul's Letter to the Philippians: "Brothers and sisters, have no anxiety at all, but by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

"Have no anxiety at all." "No se inquieten por nada" in Juarez. This weekend, when Esperanza leaves Mass, she can walk back to her new home, a luxurious 15x30, with two doors that lock, and two windows with steel bars to keep her a little more safe. Esperanza's name means "hope." She hopes in God. She has to. *And she doesn't look anxious at all. She looks happy.* She pats the block walls of her new mansion and gives each of us a hug.

“No se inquieten por nada,” Esperanza. You have your dog, you have a cinder-block home, you have a parish in the US, in Amelia, that cares about you--and you have Jesus.

There's lots of anxiety right here, isn't there? Anxiety about jobs, foreclosures, and the whole American economy, anxiety about the upcoming election; and if you care about this parish, great anxiety about the future of St. Bernadette Parish and School, which right now appears to be going bankrupt. Anxiety is about the unknown, about what we can't control or predict. I can almost see Esperanza, smiling at us Americans, calmly reassuring us, “No se inquieten por nada, amigos!” “In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” *And I should mention that St. Paul dictated those words while he was chained to a wall in prison.*

[pause] About ten years ago, one of our priests, Fr. Jim Willig, was diagnosed with terminal cancer of the kidney. Toward the end, he said, “I do not know what my future holds, but I know who holds my future!” So, we make our requests known to God, and we work as hard as we can, and we hope, like Esperanza.