

# Doña Julia's Seeds

- brother Daniel



**A** MATLÁN DE QUETZALCÓATL IS AN INDIGENOUS VILLAGE sheltered by Mexico's Sierra Tepozteca Mountains. This native community has inhabited the rugged landscape for thousands of years and the myths about its origins seem to be as old as these sacred mountains that surround it. Time in such a setting feels grounded to the soil itself, anchored in the roots of the *amate* trees or the even more ubiquitous maize. The warm days go slowly, and conversations are never hurried—there is always time in this land!



We brothers were a bit tired after spending a very full day with Lucio Pérez and his family. On our way out we stopped — quickly we thought — at Doña Julia's simple home. She is an elderly woman with dark wrinkled skin and youthful eyes that seem to smile as she tells stories slowly in her charmingly imperfect Spanish. There is wisdom

in her stories; and she invites her listeners to learn, not to be entertained.

Doña Julia's home is furnished with plastic chairs stacked in the corner of her yard. Since there are not enough chairs, she offers us some buckets that when turned upside down become fine seats for the occa-

sion. All the while her short fingers are separating grains of corn. The grains either go to a bucket or fall on the tarp spread at her feet.

As she feels and chooses the corn seeds, some will become tamales and tortillas to be eaten, and others will be planted right before the rainy season arrives. When I offer to help, she retorts: “you don’t know one seed from the other!” She has an intimate knowledge of her seeds.

She takes her time, slowly sharing the memories of this beloved landscape, just as her seeds, her life and her community abide in the same soil. As the singsong of her words shares the yearning for blessing in her people’s future, a hope for the well-being of this land is carried in her fingers as they playfully caress each seed she sorts.

The sweltering heat, the length of the day, and the lateness of the hour compel the brothers to share with her that we must move on. We thank her for the wisdom she has offered to us. She is free with her gift; she is not upset that we could not stay longer. God willing there will be another time. She simply smiles and says farewell. The maize seeds in her hands remind me of prayer beads.

Later, singing our Evening Prayer I am struck by the psalms’ strong rootedness in the experience of the land of Israel as a spiritual place, a gift of God, and the yearning for a better future. A sacrament of God’s love! Now, as we prepare to celebrate the Feast of Christmas, we rejoice in the Sacrament who is Jesus. In him we recognize the Divine Mystery incarnate in our humanity, and indeed assuming all of creation as a humble son of the land, from a lowly birth yet gifting all that is with God’s redeeming blessing!

I reflect on Jesus’ own rootedness in his native land and his use of seeds from soil to share wisdom about life, the love of God and to comfort or challenge his listeners. Jesus would refer to this “Good News” as a seed that a farmer scatters in trust. He even identifies with a grain that will have to die to give abundant fruit. We as disciples have heard the call to follow Jesus in this humble path.

As I remember Doña Julia in her sunny yard, I recognize that we too are held in God’s own hand. We have been anointed in Divine Hope as our lives unfold yearning to take root in the Gospel. There is time. *Incarnation is both a gift and a task!* ■

