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Rejoice!

*Can we call joy
that otherness we taste
within the taste of all things?¹*

- Catherine de Vinck

- brother Daniel

WHEN WE BROTHERS CAME BACK FROM MEXICO THIS winter, a friend of our community asked I if could translate a note she was writing to the women who make the embroidered shirts that we sell at the monastery. She was so thrilled by the happy feeling those garments conveyed! She spoke of the bright colors of the threads, the playful designs, the hopeful messages, and the simple beauty of the shirts. Of course it was a joy to translate her message of gratitude and appreciation to a group of women whom we brothers have come to know and befriend over the years.

Our friendship with these embroidery craftswomen began 26 years ago, when our Benedictine Sisters were staffing the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe at a squatters' settlement known as La Nopalera. They organized a sewing cooperative among the poor whom they served. This cooperative was an organic outgrowth of the faith sharing gatherings of both Sisters and neighborhood women. The women reflected weekly on their experience of poverty from the perspective of the Gospel. They decided to buy t-shirts and embroider them to resell and help their families with the extra income. They would learn embroidery from the Sisters, and would share the profits among themselves according to needs in the families rather than their skill or productivity as embroiderers. The room in the parish where they worked became a safe place to talk among themselves without fear. Here they could support one another, at times cry together, and care for each other's children when needed.

The biggest hurdle at the beginning was their husbands' resistance,

¹ from the Poem: *Master of Time* by Catherine de Vinck, in *A God of a Thousand Names*, 1993, Alleluia Press, Allendale, NJ, p. 103.

not letting them come to embroider together. The women would have to sneak out of their homes, enduring all kinds of threats. However, when the men saw the extra income they became tolerant if not supportive. Last year they celebrated their 25th Anniversary as a cooperative. About ten years ago a new bishop removed the Sisters from the parish, yet the women's friendship with them endures at the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca. Scripture continues to ground their reflections, and we brothers continue to sell their colorful shirts in our Gallery Shop. Over the last few years we could see these women standing together on the sidewalk at the bus stop after a two hour bus ride from La Nopalera. They would always be giggling, laughing and having a great time, even if they were standing under the hot sun.

In our last two visits, the women have shared with us some of their personal life stories. Many are single mothers who raised families by themselves. Most of them do domestic work as maids in different houses.

One had a son who became a taxi cab driver and was killed by a bullet from a car speeding in the middle of the day. She was devastated. The women of the cooperative accompanied her in her grief.

Another, when she turned 40, was told by her husband that she was unattractive and too old to live with. He left her by herself to raise several children. She lost her self-esteem and went into a severe depression. Although she was not an active member of the cooperative, the women reached out to her in compassion and care, loved her out of her depression, and taught her to embroider. When she saw the reception of her work she began to recover her self-esteem.

Another said good bye to her husband who was going to cross the US border looking for work. She has never heard from him since. She does not know if he died, was jailed, or simply disappeared. She had to become both mother and father to her children who are now grown up.

Another was abandoned as a baby by her mother and raised by her paternal grandmother. Her father was an alcoholic and a womanizer. None of these other "mothers" wanted or loved her. Now in the cooperative she feels loved and appreciated.

One would never guess that these cheerful women who exude such wonderful mirth, having suffered such intense pain and loss. Death and new life are real in their experience. Their playful embroidery is a jubilant resurrection cry!

Now as we celebrate Easter, we proclaim the Risen Jesus coming to meet the weeping women with the radiant injunction: Rejoice! (Mt. 28: 9), we recall that the Risen Jesus is also revealed with his wounds (Jn. 20: 19). The compelling witness of the women touching each other's wounds opens a way for us to embrace Easter joy too. How do we grow from despair to trust, from exclusion to loving welcome, from isolating individualism to caring community? Let us hope our broken world will come to savor the joyous taste of Easter. Alleluia! ■