

Happy Easter from Chamilpa

– *brother Daniel*

EARLY THIS YEAR, DURING OUR VISIT TO MEXICO, OUR SISTERS INVITED A FRIEND OF THEIRS TO SHARE her experience with us. Felicia Romero is a Nahuatl Indigenous woman in her seventies, a catechist for over 50 years who lives in the village of Chamilpa, in the outskirts of Cuernavaca. She previously worked as a typist at the Cuernavaca Federal Court, where she used every opportunity at her disposal to help the poor attain justice for their grievances. Now she is “retired” yet very involved in her community while caring for her elderly and sick husband.

Chamilpa is an ancient community. Archeologists have found ceramics dating back to 1135 B.C.E. which show strong Olmec influence. The Olmec settlements were 500 miles away, so Chamilpa was a thriving settlement long ago. Its beautiful climate and fertile soil also attracted the attention of Don Antonio de Mendoza, the first Spanish viceroy after the conquest, who “founded” the town as “San Lorenzo Chamilpa” in the early 16th Century. To this day the villagers still celebrate Saint Lawrence as their Patron Saint with great communal involvement. His feast is the main event of the year!

Leadership in the town is held by council elected every two years, and decisions are made through inclusive meetings with everybody present, young and old, men and women. This system is most evident when they prepare to celebrate the feast of Saint Lawrence. Then food has to be prepared for the whole town and the many visitors who come from all over. The fireworks are obtained. They hire musicians for both the church and the *fiesta*. It’s big!

Last year, when Gabino—one of the elders who was entrusted with the funds for the food—came to give an account of the money, he was found short 18,000 Mexican Pesos (about 953 US dollars). The whole assembly gathered to rebuke him. Only one man nicknamed *Karateca* (Karateist) spoke to the assembly asking for patience. Gabino, ashamed and in tears, was promising to repay every single peso. Felicia had not been able to attend but her husband told her about the angry threats during the meeting. Felicia, aware that Gabino and his wife are destitute, went to speak with *Karateca*. The two of them knew that Gabino would not be able to repay by himself so they organized raffles and other fundraising events with other neighbors to meet the deadline of repayment in November.

Felicia and the people of Chamilpa are very present now in Weston. I am writing this during the Octave of Easter when we brothers read the account from John’s Gospel where Jesus appears to the disciples who are gathered in fear behind locked doors, and the Risen Jesus tells them: “Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

What has enabled the people of Chamilpa to survive and thrive through the centuries? Felicia’s gift of reconciliation is rooted in compassion and spreads among her neighbors! We see glimpses of an ancient people being recreated as a new people. What about Easter happening in our country? How is it addressing our fear and division? Is the gift of the Holy Spirit enabling us to become communities of forgiveness? *How?* ■



Felicia and Sister Reyna



Felicia Romero