

***Readings for Session 2*****Guadalupe: The Path of the Broken Heart**

By Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Listen young ones...you write to me because you have heard of our La Sociedad de Nuestra Senora, Guadalupe, our group of social activists dedicated to being contemplatives in the world. And you wish to know what to call the experiences you have been having. The old fashioned words are appearances and apparitions. But I advise you to just call them by simple words. They are visits, as from a great and beloved sistermother....

Now you write that all around you everything seems often in complete mayhem and this causes you great sadness. I would agree completely. Our own sorrows seem heavy enough.... But watching others hurt and hurting is the breaker of most any heart....And so here are your hearts still unruined. This is a very good sign...there is great power in the broken heart....The heart broken open can be a blessing beyond compare. It not only allows you to see others, it allows you to constantly see her....

When I was seven years old, the grownups from my home and school life told me that I had at last reached "the age of reason." Apparently, in spite of my many childhood jailbreaks, running away from the house to be in the massive cathedrals of the forest, or baptizing flowers and children smaller than I in the creek, or staying late in the forest at night to see the eerie swampfire, in spite of these semi-terrible transgressions, I, the little ecstatic childwanderer, was now qualified to be "reason-able."...

My aunt having told me that in the next thirteen days I would see thirteen things that would affect me for life, "that will call for your help, your hands, your heart for the rest of your life," I now tried to keep my eyes truly open. She had said, "You are a little child and you can still see what most who are older no longer care to see, you can see what needs help."....

So, many things did I see during those thirteen holy days that my aunt had prepared me for. But one of the most startling I saw [was] as I wandered down a dirt road through the far woods. A little ways down the road a big sheriff's car, in an even bigger cloud of dust, skidded to a stop off to the side of the road where a little deeper in the woods was a stick-pole encampment of some of the hobo people who regularly jumped from the freight train uproad and stayed for periods of time in our neck of the woods.

I think there are times when you can smell mal-intention coming. I quickly jumped into the field at the roadside and lay down to hide....The deputies jerked aside the canvas flap of the stick-pole tent and charged right in. Less than a minute later, amidst all hell breaking loose and with terrible sounds of cook pots clanging and falling and scuffling sounds, and much crying out and epithets, one deputy dragged a half-naked man in manacles from out of the canvas hovel.

He was dressed like many who lived hidden in that part of the woods, many who came up from the hills, some of whom I had made best friends with. His torn strappy T-shirt was gray with oils, his trousers were stained with paint and dirt. He was unwashed, unshaven, uncombed, and, like a bull roped to the ground, his eyes were rolling, his mouth slobbering as he cried out what sounded to me like, "Milady! Milady!" The deputy shoved the disheveled man into the patrol car and slammed the door and ran back to the tent.

As I watched frightened and horror-stricken, I thought I heard in my head a calm and gentle voice asking, "Do you love me?"

"Love you? Love you?" I thought. My anguish over what I was seeing was so great I could hardly comprehend the words being spoken into the ear of my heart.

"If you love me, comfort them."

"What?" I thought, trying to understand. Before I could react, the deputies dragged a screaming woman from the tent. She struggled against their manhandling of her. She had a short lit cigarette between two fingers, and she wore only one shoe, a broken-down black flat....The men had hold of her so-thin arms, like a corpse's almost, and right before my eyes they bent her arms backwards to angles not truly possible. And she was all flaming words and flailing limbs. She screamed and screamed and for one breathtaking moment I felt she looked directly at me, appealing directly to me, though surely she could not have seen me in the dense field across the road, "Help me, help me," she screamed again and again.

I heard a calm voice in my panicked heart ask:

"Do you love me?"

"If you do, then help me."

I felt deeply confused, yet I shot up like a quail. I had sudden turbines in my legs, my arms reaching ten feet ahead of me, my lungs filling with a gigantic thundercloud. My head back, I ran like a crazy child the distance down and across the road. The deputies were pushing her into the car, they were slamming the door on the couple. The officers piled into the front seat and slammed their own doors. I could still hear the woman screaming.

"Help me, help me."

Completely panicked but somehow able, I thought, "Yes, I will help you." Agonized still, but in a new way, I thought, "But how? How?"

I came up alongside the back end of the big sedan just as the car began pulling away. I yelled out loudly—I hope I called out in a voice that could be heard from earth to the heavens, but I am afraid that I was so filled with fear that maybe I only croaked. Yet, I felt I pulled in the breath of windstorms and that I thundered out as strongly as I could...."In Her name and all that is holy, do these people no harm!"

The deputies startled and braked the car. I just had enough time to throw myself across the trunk where the faces of the two haggard and manacled souls gazed up at me with what seemed like excellent wonder. I just had enough time, one split second, to use three of my fingers at once to make the Sign of the Cross on the dusty back window and cry out, "These souls are

under my protection.” Now the car window was rolling down on the driver’s side. I skidded off the car and fell to the road....Now the door was opening on the driver’s side. I scrambled to my feet, and ran as though a demon were chasing me....

I did not know what I enacted then or later. I am not ever certain yet these many years later. I only know I followed rather than led....

I do not know what the man and woman did wrong. Likely nothing. Vagrant. Talking too loud, making love too loud, or just by their presence disturbing the gentry who had come to build big houses out in the woods and who we knew were made uncomfortable by us, the truly rustic. I only know that the sounds of thuds of fists on bone is a truly sickening sound and the sound and feel of these were not unfamiliar to me before or after. Life went on. But for me, not as before. . . .

Though I could go on as before, pick self up for thousandth time, millionth time, and go on because there was nothing else to do...—still, I could never forget. I had a strange moment in time, what I someday would come to understand as the transformative moment, as when lightning strikes, and all vision and knowing is changed in an instant. On the road with the people in the woods, I thought I had seen the holy people being manhandled. Through the back of the car window, those poor imprisoned innocents, I thought I saw for a moment, both of them, man and woman, as *mi Guadalupe*. I thought for a split second, I saw in both of them *mi Guadalupe* suffering. I thought I saw Her being assaulted. This was the end of my life as I had known it to that time. “Do you love me? Then help me.” This was one of my thirteen post-consecration callings.

When I told my aunt what had happened, she cried and took my hands. “You do not have to ask who says, “They are under my protection,”” she said. “You already know.”

I felt I did know.

Twelve years later, when I was nineteen, I heard this from Her:

“Do you love me, my sister?”

I answered, “Yes, my Dear One, I love you.”

“How much do you love me?”

“With all my heart, my Beloved.”

“Will you then visit me in prison?”

“In prison?”

I was afraid to go to prison. But I went, as I would go on pilgrimage in the ensuing years to other prisons, those made by government, and those many, many soul prisons, human-made, and to my own imprisonments, as well, some of choice, some by fate.

I promised then that if I kept hearing Her call, I would try to keep going where sent. As you can see, I am a fool for Her completely. I am still going. This time it is the immigration jail; other years, it has been pilgrimages several times a year to other places—the locked institution for boys aged eighteen to twenty-one, the locked institutions for girls and boys aged twelve to eighteen, the men’s penitentiary, the women’s federal prison, the city and the county

jails, the state prisons, sometimes ministering to patients at city hospitals brought in chains for a needed surgery.

It goes on, as it always has. Do you love me?

Yes, I love you.

Will you then come visit me in the home for unwed mothers? I would—and there the next sword was run through my heart.

Do you love me?

Yes, I love you.

Will you help run a shelter for battered women? Will you lick the wounds of the wounded?

Yes. Another sword. Do you love me?

Yes, I love you, my Dear.

Will you walk with me through skid row with alcohol swabs and wipe hands and feet teeming with bacteria, the cuts and hurts of the men and women who can hardly be told apart. Will you do that for me?

Yes. A big sword.

Do you love me? With all that I am.

Will you stand in the cold of a Chicago night in the dead of the winter listening to me dressed as an old man telling his life's tale with the worst breath you could ever imagine?

Yes, this I can do.

Do you love me? Do you love me?

Yes, yes, a thousand times yes.

So, m'hijas y m'hijos, now I am at the end of this missive to you. You have asked me the way to continue and to deepen your devotion to Her. I have this great feeling in my bones that you already well know the way and just need a tiny little reminder: She comes in untidy ways mostly, often in very big and very bold form rather than demure. You will recognize Her on sight, for She is a woman who looks just like you and all that you love.

Mi Guadalupe is a girl gang leader in heaven.

She is unlike the pale blue serene woman.

She is serene, yes, like a great ocean is serene.

She is obedient, yes, like the sunrise is obedient to the horizon line.

She is sweet, yes,

like a huge forest of sweet maple trees.

She has a great heart, vast holiness and like any girl gang leader ought, substantial hips.

Her lap is big enough to hold every last one.

Her embrace can hold us,

All.

