

A mother's odyssey

Sandra, as many Hispanic people we find in American streets and workplaces, has a heroic story of faith and courage that is worthwhile to be shared. Her adventure started in her Central American country, when she found out that she was pregnant. Her partner, who mistreated her physically and emotionally, instead of being happy with the news, beat her and told her that maybe the baby wasn't his. Her maternal love gave her the strength to finally escape from this destructive relationship. The safest thing to do was, with God's help, trying to reach her cousin, who was working in a restaurant in the United States. With her cousin's help she could maybe find a job to save her life and her baby's life.

A generous friend lent her some money that helped her start her immigrant's adventure. Sometimes she wandered for days. Other days she was lucky to find a cheap transportation and almost always she spent the night under a bridge or in the streets to save some money. It took her two months to reach Mexico City. There, sometimes she worked at a restaurant in exchange of food and others she begged in the streets. In the meantime, her womb continued to grow showing signs of the vital presence of her baby. That's why, when she reached the sanctuary of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which is a mandatory stop for all of those who emigrate, Sandra begged for her and her child's protection. For, who better than the Guadalupe's Virgin, who appeared as a pregnant Indian, to know what it means to accept and protect the sacredness of a new life? Besides, she had also run away to Egypt to save her son's life. Fortified by this visit, she continued her journey to the border.

A "coyote" (name given to those who are paid to help emigrants to cross the border), accepted her in his group. They were supposed to cross the Grande's river at night tied with a rope, with no suitcases, purses or wallets, not even an I.D. card. Deprived of any property, but hugging with love the creature who often moved in her womb, she got into the river and even though the cold and the fear made her tremble she made it to the other side of the river. Immediately after that, they went to a rocky desert filled with bushes and thorns. There was no time to stop and check the wounds that the thorns caused in her feet and legs. The "coyote" was always rushing them. They had to walk as much as they could at night and the first hours of the day

before the heat of the sun made them stop.

In the same group of Sandra there was a 22-year-old girl named Soraya, who had to leave her 18-month-old baby to reach her husband who needed her because he was lying in bed sick after having a work accident. Soraya was always the last one and complained because she was thirsty and tired. They slept a little bit at sunset before the coyote woke them up at dawn. But before they started their journey, the coyote made them pray Psalm 91: "Mi protection and my shelter, my God, in whom I trust... won't be afraid of the night fears nor the arrow thrown during the day...Even though a thousand men fall at your side..."

Two days and two nights went by until Soraya, who was exhausted and dehydrated screamed and dropped dead. Then they all made a circle around her, covered her in rocks and prayed together the Psalm 91. This death shook Sandra. But she couldn't quit. She had to go on and save her son! Besides, God was her guarantee that "Even though a thousand men fall at your side ... I will make the days longer as the faithful asked for and I will make sure that he can see my salvation." (Ps. 91, 7.16)

They finally got to a path where they found transportation to a big city, and then Sandra took a bus to Maryland. As soon as she could, Sandra looked for prenatal care at a medical center, to check her seven month pregnancy. However, the only thing she got was a bad attitude from a woman who screamed at her saying: "Women like you, without money, a husband nor papers, instead of having children they should look for an abortion clinic!"

But, what kind of solution was this? If she had gone through half a continent by foot, hungry, and tired not to kill her child, but to free him from poverty and mistreatment.

Thanks to another friend Sandra found help at the Tepeyac Center, that helps pregnant women. Two months later, the baby was born. Nowadays, Sandra makes a living making tamales. Sometimes she has returned to Tepeyac Center to show them her son with pride and give us some tamales to express her gratitude. But at the Center, we all feel that we are the ones who should thank God for the courage and faith with which Sandra strives for the sacredness of life. And we hope one day, with God's help, Sandra could legalize the immigrant's situation so that nothing can

separate her from her child and her dream for a safe life for both of them.

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