



SAN DIEGO DECAMERON PROJECT

Communions

Irene A. Márquez

I don't quite remember when I had the idea. Maybe when I read about people making bread during Shelter in Place.

I am not much for bread, but ah! Tortillas. *De harina*. Flour ones. So what else would a Mexican American woman make. Even Mary Salas, mayor of Chula Vista, was trying her hand at it. Returning to our roots. That familiar place now on unfamiliar grounds.

Remembering thrice a week, at least, the ritual of my mother rolling dough and shaping perfect discs with her hands. A quick toss onto the hot cast iron pan and watching rising bubbles confirmed the perfect combination for the most delicious of treats.

She'd hand me a fresh rolled tortilla smeared with creamy butter, and a sprinkling of salt. Yum.

Now there was calling to perform my own rite.

Little detail. I never learned how.

Google: YouTube: How to make flour tortillas. I don't care what instructional videos show, it's an art. It's a mix of the right water temperature, heat, and much more for a simple recipe. In addition to forming the perfect circle to avoid them looking like Florida or Texas—a running joke among families when first learning.

There was a flour shortage for a time. I panicked. I still needed much more time for my rite.

My daughter, Carla, saved the day with not only one five lb. bag, but two at a somewhere grocery store.

At times, I felt my mother's spirit over my left shoulder giving me confidence.

After countless cracked, tasteless tortillas thrown in the trash, (thank god, flour is cheap), I finally had tasty pliable ones that weren't maybe as good as Mom's, but pretty close.

"I'll be happy to make you some," I told my fellow writers from our Zoom read and critique group.

"Free delivery! No charge." It was my gift—because, because now more than ever we, as humans, needed to share, to give, to offer.

Nourishing the body.

Tortillas took me back to a time of comfort, and now another memory of one more ritual surfaced from my childhood.

Catholic Mass.

Here again another detail.

I am secular. Years ago, I gave up on the idea of god. No doubt my mother, grandmothers, rolling in their graves, but presently there was a yearning of a lost but familiar practice.

It took time until churches opened. But finally I received an email from The Brothers of the Little Oratory in San Diego and Chorus who offer Mass in Latin. My favorite. I'm old, old school. With a veil on my head, as when I was a young girl, I looked forward to listening to sounds which took me to another world. A sacred place of bells tingling and the only thing which spread were blessings. It was not lost on me that here, too, white wafers were served.

Nourishing the soul.

The pounding of the roller on white dough, or the hearing of "Espiritu Santo."
Rituals from time before time.

Satisfying. Centering. Stabilizing. While a collective earthquake trembles under our feet, there are tortillas to make and Latin Mass to attend.

