



## **80 YEARS AFTER THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE MY TRIBUTE TO GABRIELA MISTRAL**

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I am Mario J. Paredes; I hold a post-graduate degree in Philosophy from Georgetown University in Washington DC. I was born in Chile, but since a young age I have lived in New York, where, thanks to my commitment to the Catholic Church, and its work, I have served in leadership roles in various institutions such as the Northeast Hispanic Catholic Center, the American Bible Society, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Pontifical Commission for Latin American, as well as others. Currently I serve as President of the International Academy for Catholic Leaders; and a CEO of the SOMOS Community Care Health Organization, as well as treasurer and secretary of the Gabriela Mistral Foundation, a non-profit organization based in New York. I am honored to collaborate in this organization as I have been influenced by the profound humanism of Gabriela Mistral, the multifaceted educator, diplomat, poet, journalist and intellectual.

Latin America, and Chileans in particular, are currently immersed in what has been dubbed to be “the Mistralian year,”—a series of celebrations taking place in Chile and elsewhere to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gabriela Mistral’s Nobel Prize in Literature which will be celebrated on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025. When the Nobel Prize was awarded to her, she became the first Latin American person—and to date, still the only Latin American woman to have received this well-deserved and honorably distinction in the history of the Nobel Prize. The Gabriela Mistral Foundation, on whose board I have served since its inception, joins in this celebration.

During my early school years, I learned the poem entitled “Little Feet,” and years later, my Catholic spiritual life was enriched by “Prayer to the Christ of Calvary.” Two poems by our great Gabriela Mistral, which, yesterday as well as today, retain their fragrance and message in favor of the highest human and Christian values, they extend in time—the importance that the famous Chilean poet has for Latin American and world knowledge of arts and literature, and extend the inspiration that inspire my personal story as a humanist, a Christian and a Catholic.

“Little Feet” is a poem that at first glance, appears to describe a child’s feet but, in its beautiful simplicity—like all of Mistral’s body of work—hides profound messages: the innocence and purity of childhood, the vulnerability of human beings, suffering, the call to protect children, the confrontation with evil and suffering in human existence, an exhortation to empathy, compassion

and solidarity among humanity. It is in this manner that the great poet transforms everyday reality into profound reflections with universal character and validity.

### **Little Feet<sup>1</sup>**

Little feet of children  
blue with cold,  
how can they see you and not cover you—  
dear God!

Little wounded feet  
cut by every stone,  
hurt by snow  
and mire.

Man, blind, does not know  
that where you pass,  
you leave a flower  
of living light.

And where you set  
your little bleeding foot,  
the spikenard blooms  
more fragrant.

Walking straight paths,  
be heroic, little feet,  
as you are  
perfect.

Little feet of children,  
two tiny suffering jewels,  
how can people pass  
and not see you!

With the “Prayer to the Christ of Calvary,” Gabriela Mistral reveals and gives us the religious meaning of her life and work. In this beautiful literary piece, Mistral pleads for forgiveness and redemption for herself and of everyone. She invites us to identify with the sufferings of the Crucified One to shed light on our own daily sufferings. She confronts cruelty and the human condition with infinite divine mercy: the forgiving love of God and of man, in which a hopeful future for all humanity rests.

### **Prayer to the Christ of Calvary<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: Doris Dana

<sup>2</sup> Translation: Gabriela Mistral Foundation, Inc. ©

Christ of Calvary, this afternoon  
I came to plead with you for my ailing flesh,  
but upon seeing you, with shame, my eyes go  
back and forth, from your body to mine.

How can I complain of my weary feet,  
when I see that yours are destroyed?  
How can I show you my empty hands,  
when yours are covered with wounds?

How can I explain my loneliness to you,  
when high on the cross, alone you are?  
How can I explain to you, that love I do not have,  
when your heart has been torn?

I no longer remember anything,  
all my ailments are gone from me.  
The urgency of the plea I had,  
chokes within my imploring voice.

In now only plead for plead for nothing,  
to be here, beside your dying image,  
to learn that pain is only  
the Holy key to your Holy door.

Amen

But, in addition to my fondness for Mistral's poetry and the impact and influence that the poems I have cited have had in my life, there are two significant events that I now share that show the decisive ways and paths through which my life has been—especially recent decades—that are linked to the figure and memory of Gabriela Mistral.

**The first:** took place in the late 1970s, when Doris Dana, who was Gabriela Mistral's secretary in New York, and later appointed as Mistral's executor, learned that I was Chilean. One day, while I was serving as Director of the Northeast Hispanic Catholic Center, she called me to invite me for coffee, and to offer me what remained of Gabriela Mistral's personal library in New York.

I later visited her at her residence in Manhattan's Greenwich Village and, on behalf of the aforementioned institution, I received the poets' important legacy of approximately 500 books. Today, the building of the organization that was located in New York's Archdiocesan Center no longer exists. Time and my subsequent positions have distanced me from this legacy.

**The second** Mistralian event stems from a fortuitous encounter with the then Chilean Ambassador to the United Nations, Hon. Dr. Heraldo Muñoz. From that conversation, the idea to create a Foundation to honor the memory, life, work and the presence of the illustrious Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral in New York, the city where she lived and died. She was an important and eminent Latin American woman as well as a figure who inspire the life, work and contributions of Hispanics in New York and throughout the United States. This is the origin of the Gabriela Mistral

Foundation, based in New York, of which I have served as co-founder and Vice-President and today as its secretary and Treasurer.

The 2007 inauguration of our Foundation was attended by then President Michelle Bachelet, who with her presence, helped to further the charitable work that benefits Chilean communities and that our Foundation has sponsored for so many years, as well as defending and promoting the legacy of our illustrious Chilean compatriot. A good example of our Mistralian work as a Foundation, is the achievement of the opening of a school in Queens, New York, named Gabriela Mistral Campus, thanks to the efforts of the current president of the foundation, Gloria Garafulich.

May there be many years of Mistral's celebrations! May art and poetry, reflections of the nobility of the human spirit endure and spread among us! May men and women like Gabriela Mistral inspire our daily lives! May poetry flourish among us, and may we always return and drink from the fountain of love and the best values that are represented by the life and work of Gabriela Mistral!

*Mario J. Paredes was awarded in 2018 the Order of Merit Gabriela Mistral by the Government of Chile. Mr. Paredes is currently the Treasurer of the Gabriela Mistral Foundation, Inc.*