These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Joan Mader, CSC, who read them at the memorial Mass on October 5, 2020.

Sister Jacinta was one of my favorite people. She made a big difference in my life. I have such happy memories of her. I say this from my connection with her since 1975 at the first Holy Cross Hispanic Ministry Committee gathering, and from living with her in Monterrey, Mexico, for four years and keeping up with her afterward. How many others could say the same? Certainly, her family: her parents who immigrated from Mexico and her two sisters and two brothers, her multiple nieces and nephews. She was very close to her family and often talked about her sisters, Elvira and Angie. And her students: she taught elementary and high school Spanish for a combined 24 years. Afterward, there were all the people she met working with the Cursillo ministry, the United Farm Workers, Encuentros gatherings, and the Centro Pastoral, which became the Diocesan Office of Hispanic Ministry of San José, California. Later she worked with migrant communities in Richfield, Utah, and seminarians in San Antonio, Texas. She touched and changed the lives of many people.

María Socorro Millán, later Sister Jacinta, was born into a Spanish speaking home and only learned English in first grade when she went to Holy Cross Mission School in Ventura, California. Sister Kathleen Anne Nelligan, CSC, was her teacher! Besides having a wonderful teacher, she also was at the best age for learning a second language. Jacinta was perfectly bilingual. She received a scholarship to attend the Academy of Saint Catherine in Ventura. It was during her junior year retreat that she felt she was being called to religious life in Holy Cross.
As a young sister she had hoped to go to the mission in Brazil, but health issues made this impossible. Jacinta was fiercely proud of her Mexican heritage and found her calling within her religious vocation in accompanying her people, defending them, and seeking ways to improve their lives. She was enthusiastic, energetic, organized, thoughtful, generous, fun-loving and fully engaged in whatever she was doing.

She was the first to go to the new mission in Nuevo León, Mexico. It had been hard for her to leave her seminary ministry in San Antonio, but after visiting the mission, she fell in love with Mexico, the home of her parents. She served in parishes in Monterrey and Guadalupe, Nuevo León, for only five years, but made a huge impression on the people. She had multiple ministries, focusing especially on women and children and the poorest of the poor. She had a habit of making many quick visits and phone calls every day. The people loved her! Twenty years later people of La Luz Parish were still asking about Sister Jacinta.

Father Pete Logsdon, CSC, shared, “When Jacinta first arrived in Monterrey, she stayed with the priests while looking for a place to live. Super Bowl Sunday was the day after she arrived. After the last Mass, we got some tacos from across the street. We got out some very cold Mexican beer and sat down to watch the football game. That’s when Sister Jacinta started to write letters! I never let her forget it!” Correspondence was very important to her, even during football games. She wrote little notes all the time and sent them back to the United States with anyone who was visiting.

Father Jack Keefe, CSC, spoke of his tremendous respect for Jacinta and his gratitude for the ways she helped him with his Spanish and encouraged him in other pastoral matters. She told him to read the Gospel out loud, over and over again. This is what she did when she entered the Congregation and had no one to speak Spanish with her. She helped build up
the catechist programs, Dinamicas Matrimoniales, a weekend retreat for married couples, and Centros Biblicos, small groups of women who met weekly to study, share, pray and do outreach. She was great for planning outings. She helped members of these groups plan picnics and outings involving busloads of people. She encouraged the local community to do the same and we enjoyed a few memorable days in Cancún.

Jacinta knew when to move on. She was 65 when she went to Mexico in 1994. Five years later, she knew it was time to move on to something a little less physically demanding. At Holy Cross Ministries in Salt Lake City, Utah, she continued using her language and pastoral skills with staff and clients and in visits to the sick. She also continued offering outings, now to any visitors, suggesting a trip to the local library or to one of her favorite parks. When she left after 10 years to go to Ventura, about 300 people came to her farewell party.

Sister Mary Tiernan, CSC, remembers an Area of North America Assembly that had a Mexican theme. There were decorations and music, and our sisters from Mexico performed some dances. Mary found Jacinta in tears. Jacinta said, “I never thought I would see this day.” The music, songs, dances, color, spirit and the connection with her heritage touched her deeply.

Sister Patricia Ann Thompson, CSC, commented on Jacinta’s commitment to prayer and to justice, her sense of God in her life, and God’s presence in caring for her family. She was a “super person.”

Like Don Quixote, Jacinta had an “Impossible Dream” and spent her life pursuing it. Now she has achieved her goal. No doubt she is dancing in heaven, reunited with her family, friends and companions in the Congregation and beyond, students, coworkers and the numerous people she encouraged along the way. Thank you, Jacinta, for your vibrant, courageous life. Thank you for sharing it in Holy Cross.