



THE TAOS NEWS

Best U.S. Weekly Paper- NNA 2007, 2008, 2010
Inland Press Nation's Best Weekly Newspaper 2009

The Blessing Way

San Isidro and the blessing of fields in Taos

By David Fernández de Taos

The Taos News, 5/10/2018



File photo

Brothers Manuel and Salvador Cordova clean the acequia that runs through El Pueblo Lodge in 2017.

As I arrived at town hall to listen to the updates on the big Abeyta water settlement agreement, I was astounded to see an old ox-drawn wagon parked outside. A winged angel stood in the cart holding the reins over two slumbering oxen.

I shrugged my shoulders and went into the meeting room which was filled with lawyers, officials, and water bureaucrats. And sitting in the front row was an older, bearded, rugged-looking man who seemed clearly out of place. I asked him, "Is that your wagon out there?" He smiled and replied, "Sí, Señor."

I said, "Then you must be--?"

He said, "Sí. Soy San Isidro Labrador. I came to see what this crew is up to."

I said, "Yo tambien. Me too. ¡A vér!"

This is the time of year when, in our Northern traditional communities, one may well witness a familiar sight, which is the procession of people coming out of the churches or *capillas* or *moradas*, following the lead guide figure of the wooden santo representing Saint Isidore, or San Isidro Labrador. He is the patron saint of agricultural and pastoral lands. The faithful walk out on the fertile lands and to the edge of rivers and ditches to invoke the saint's blessing for productive and fruitful yields of harvest.

This blessing tradition continues now as it has for centuries here and is faithfully carried out in the Cordillera-Los Cordovas area near Ranchos de Taos in the Taos Valley, emanating from the old Capilla de San Isidro Labrador. A special Mass is said there, and then the procession takes place on the pastoral lands and eventually moves on to the Río Pueblo de Taos, the source of life-giving water through the centuries-old acequia systems. There the blessing is said by the community together with the local priest.

The "official" feast day of San Isidro is May 15 although many communities conduct the blessing ceremony on a day or week that is specifically appropriate for their own circumstances and when more people will be able to come, for example, on a weekend.

The San Isidro Blessing is one of the fundamental religious traditions of Northern New Mexico, and from older times has represented the union of the people's work and alimentary needs with the providence of the Most High.

Some say that this year's San Isidro Blessing may be more necessary given the uncertainty many are facing due to the severe economic times, the recent developments regarding the pastoral and agricultural lands tax reassessment valuations and other factors, including the regionwide water settlement agreements.

Some are praying for a miracle through San Isidro to ease all the current problems.

Yet the people here continue with the venerable work of clearing the acequias, preparing the lands, planting the seeds of the sustenance of life and invoking the blessing of the Author of life for a good harvest.

It is fundamentally important that the relationship of the people with the fertile world and lands should continue. This work and these traditions are like a parable of a good way to live and produce in a world which is demonstrably at odds many times with this simple beneficent concept.

It is lamentable that in this year's springtime the world's people are still faced with issues that are contrary to peace and life. While the workers are planting the seeds for the sustenance of life, many are planting the seeds of destruction. Due to war and violence and ludicrous bureaucracy many millions of people have nothing to eat and are victims even of their own political and secular leaders, and some are also victims of so-called "religious leaders."

The question always arises, what does humanity want? In this springtime, do the people want the destruction of life and of the world? Or, do the people want the continuation of life and of the beauty of the fruitful and sustaining world?

And there is a powerful parallel question: Do the people prefer the blessing--or the cursing--of life and of the vital mystery that humankind has lived with since the beginning of everything?

Many people have their own answer and their own take on these questions. Here, the balance seems tilted in favor of the Blessing Way, through the intercession of San Isidro Labrador and the Santos and through the work of the great-souled people in the world and in Northern New Mexico.