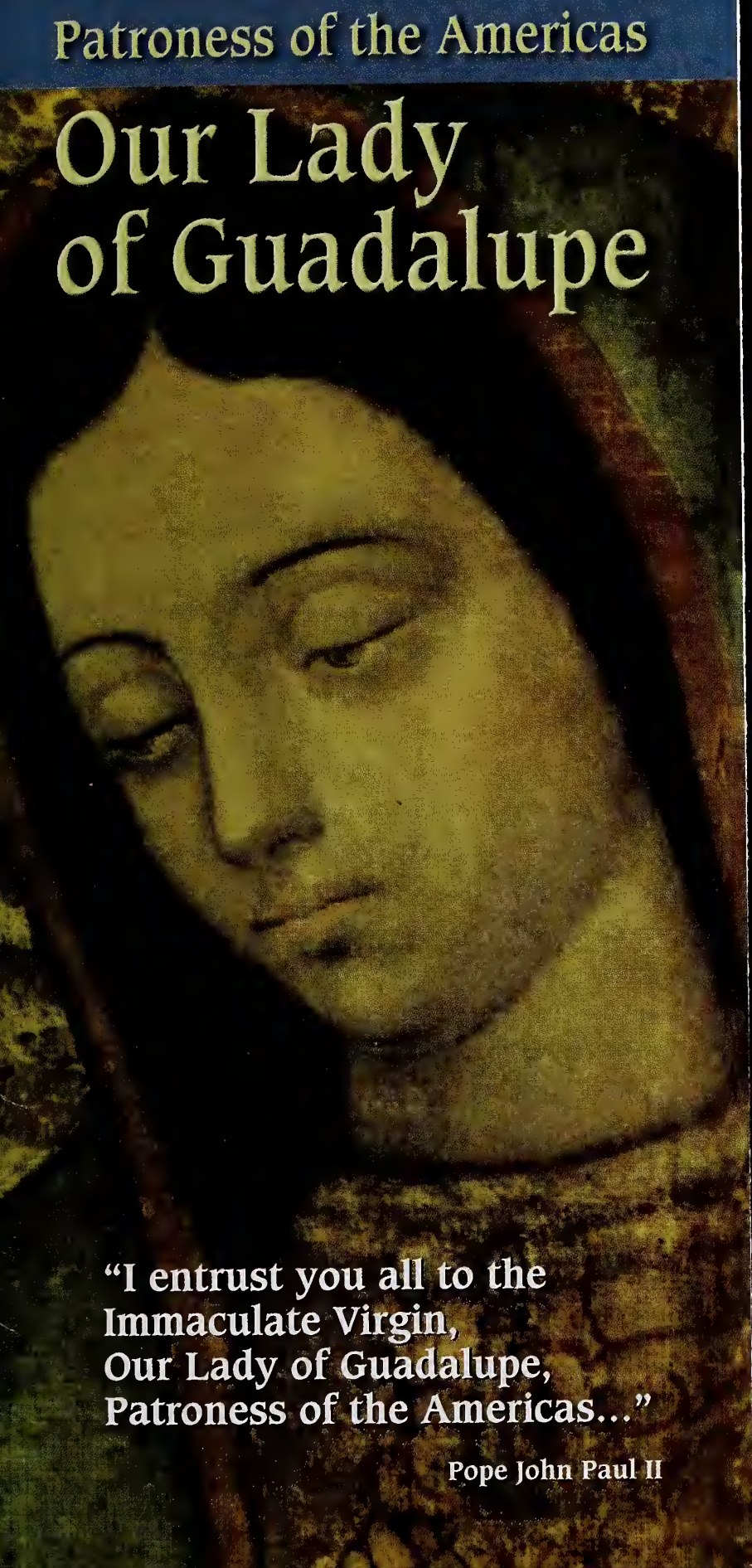


Patroness of the Americas

Our Lady of Guadalupe



“I entrust you all to the
Immaculate Virgin,
Our Lady of Guadalupe,
Patroness of the Americas...”

Pope John Paul II

The second most visited Catholic shrine outside of St. Peter's can be found in the northern neighborhood of Villa de Guadalupe Hidalgo in Mexico City. High on a wall in the circular basilica hangs a nearly 500-year-old *tilma*, or cloak, mysteriously imprinted with the image of a dark-skinned woman clad in a star-spangled blue cape. She is Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Why has the message of this shrine and apparition so endeared itself to millions of believers across the world? Because Our Lady, like the God whom she bore and adored, took on the form of the poorest of the poor, to encourage, to remind, to love, to comfort, to reveal her Son. And her message is intended for each and every one of us.



The Story of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Our information about the Lady of Guadalupe is based on a sixteenth-century work written in Nahuatl, the Aztec language, by the Indian scholar Antonio Valeriano.

On Saturday, December 9, 1531, a poor Aztec named Juan Diego was on his way to Mass when he neared a hill not far from a former temple once dedicated to the virgin mother of Aztec gods. Suddenly, he heard the most beautiful music and smelled a sweet aroma that made him wonder if he was dreaming. But then, he spied a beautiful lady with a dark complexion who asked him where he was going. When he told her he was going to Mass, she smiled and said:

“Know for certain, my son, the smallest one, that I am the perfect and ever virgin holy Mary, mother of the true God, through whom one lives, the creator of mankind, the one who owns what is Near and Beyond, the owner of heaven and earth. I ardently desire that here they build me my sacred little house, a *Teocalli*, where I will show him, I will exalt him and make him manifest. Where I will offer him to all the people with all my love, my compassionate gaze, my help, and my salvation, because I am truly your merciful mother, yours and mother of all who live united in this land, and of all mankind, of all those who love me, of those who cry to me, of those who search for me, of those who have confidence in me. There I will listen to their cry, to their sadness, so as to curb all their different pains, their miseries and sorrow, to remedy and alleviate their sufferings.”

Juan Diego was then charged with taking this message to his bishop.

The Bishop's Challenge

Although impressed with Juan's humility and sincerity, the bishop hesitated to trust his word. He asked Juan to visit with him on another day when, he promised, he would take the heavenly Lady's message into consideration.

A deflated Juan Diego met with the heavenly Lady and begged her to entrust the message to a more important person than himself. But the beautiful woman only repeated her request and assured Juan that her desire was to entrust him with this mission. Heartened, he promised to deliver her message the next afternoon.

The next day, Juan Diego arrived at the bishop's place of residence and requested an audience. Once again, the bishop questioned him but did not believe what he was told and asked for a sign from the heavenly Lady.

When Juan surprised the bishop by confidently asking him what type of sign he would like, the bishop didn't answer, only dismissed him and sent some trusted aides to follow and observe him. Juan went directly to Tepeyac Hill, where he met Our Lady and communicated the bishop's demand. She listened, then asked Juan to return the next morning, December 12.

The Signs of Guadalupe

The next day, instead of meeting with Our Lady, Juan went to find a priest to administer the last rites to his dying uncle. Even on this alternate route, however, Our Lady appeared to him and asked where he was going. Ashamed, Juan explained. Our Lady responded, "Listen and let it penetrate your heart, my dear son. Do not be troubled or weighed down with grief. Do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety or pain. Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection . . . is



THE CROSSIERS

there anything else you need?"

Juan Diego's uncle recovered from his illness at that very moment.

Our Lady then told Juan to go to the top of the hill, where he would find a variety of flowers blooming in the frozen ground. They would be the sign the bishop requested.

Juan obeyed, gathered the blooms and arranged them in his *tilma*, after which Our Lady instructed him to reveal the content only to the bishop.

When he arrived at the bishop's residence, authorities first met Juan with suspicion and demanded to know the contents of his *tilma*. But when the bishop heard the commotion, he welcomed Juan. At this welcome, Juan knew the time was right to show the bishop the sign he had requested. So he opened his cloak, the flowers cascaded to the ground — and the bishop and others in the room gazed in awe and fell to their knees in veneration. Amazed, Juan Diego looked to his *tilma* and realized that the image of Our Lady was miraculously imprinted there. In light of this clear sign, the humbled bishop begged for Juan Diego's forgiveness and invited him to be his honored guest at his residence.

A Holy Day

Our Lady of Guadalupe may be the most recognized apparition of the Blessed Virgin in the world. Twenty-five popes have honored her, and millions of pilgrims have come to ask her intercession and to recognize her as mother, protectress, and guardian. In 1999, Pope John Paul II declared December 12 a holy day for the entire American continent and placed all young children, especially the unborn, under her care.

Celebrate!

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a day of regional and spiritual pride for Hispanics, is marked by major fiestas throughout Mexico, Central America, and the Southwestern United States.

Typically, December 12 is celebrated with fireworks, processions, feasts, and the celebration of Mass. One favorite custom is to place a small tin or silver object shaped like a heart, arm, or leg on or near a statue of the Virgin to represent answered prayer, especially for health.

In Mexico City, pilgrims gather near the cathedral, where the *tilma* is displayed as early as three days in advance. Thousands come on bicycle, and many crawl long distances on their knees as a sign of penance. In Oaxaca, young children are dressed up to represent the many native tribes of Mexico who come to honor Our Lady. In other areas, children dress like Juan Diego or even the Virgin herself.

Coming as it does during the Advent season, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe provides parishes and families an opportunity to remember Our Lady in a special way as we wait with her for the birth of Christ. A meal showcasing Mexican fare, such as enchiladas, tacos, sopapillas, mole, and guacamole, is always appropriate. Corn cakes (or corn chips) and candy sticks can be given to children, as well as paper roses to symbolize the flowers that Juan Diego gathered in his cloak.



5 Ways to Celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Homes and Parishes

- 1.** Our Lady of Guadalupe reminds us of answered prayer. Create images of answered prayers to place beside a picture or statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This might be a heart to represent comfort received, an eye in thanks for successful eye surgery, or a business card in gratitude for a new job.
- 2.** Discuss issues prevalent in our world today to which Our Lady calls our attention. Conclude with a prayer for these concerns and discuss the possibility of further action to respond to these situations.
- 3.** Make a novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe as a parish or a family. See www.sancta.org.
- 4.** Include the story of St. Juan Diego in your Advent preparations. Serve Mexican flan as a treat. (Find a simple recipe at www.recipezaar.com/113507.)
- 5.** Invite local Hispanic parishes, families, and individuals to share their devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Prayer

Our Lady of Guadalupe, we find you among the poor, the small, those the world counts for nothing. You remind us of our priorities. You remind us how precious each of us is to you and to your Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ. You comfort us in our suffering. You challenge us to use our strengths. You call us to do whatever He tells us (John 2:5).

May we heed your message given us at Guadalupe: to acknowledge God's love, to protect the innocent, to replace our fear with trust, to keep our priorities in order. We ask this through the mercy and grace of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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For More Information:

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Francis Johnston, *The Wonder of Guadalupe* (Tan Books and Publishers, 1981).

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William G. Storey, *Mother of the Americas: A Novena in Honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe* (Liturgy Training Publications, 2003).

Web sites:

<http://www.sancta.org>

<http://www.guadalupe Shrine.org>

<http://www.olgaustin.org/symbolism.html>

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200 Noll Plaza • Huntington, IN 46750
1-800-348-2440 • Fax: 1-800-498-6709 • www.osv.com

By Ana Arista White
with Woodeene Koenig-Bricker
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