



OUR LADY, QUEEN OF ALL AMERICA

Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe
spans and renews cultures

BY THOMAS A. SZYSZKIEWICZ

EDITOR'S NOTE: In August 2009, the Knights of Columbus will host its first ever international Marian Congress, devoted to Our Lady of Guadalupe, following the 127th Supreme Convention in Phoenix.

When the Virgin Mary first appeared to St. Juan Diego on Dec. 9, 1531, she expressed her desire that a church be erected on Tepeyac Hill, near present-day Mexico City. "There," she said, "I may exhibit all my love, compassion, help and protection, because I am your merciful mother, to you, and to all the inhabitants on this land and all the rest who love me, invoke and confide in me."

A church was built in obedience to Mary's request, and the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe stands on that site today.

More than 450 years after Our Lady's initial appearance to St. Juan Diego, the Holy Spirit prompted the bishop of a rural diocese in Wisconsin to fulfill a similar request.

Not long after Archbishop Raymond L. Burke was ordained the bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, Wis., in 1995, he issued a pastoral letter expressing a desire that a shrine be built in honor of Our Lady.

"I had seen the decrease in the devotional life when I was first ordained a priest in 1975 and I wanted to do something to try to restore that," recalled Archbishop Burke. A member of Bishops Council 10490 in St. Louis, Mo., Archbishop Burke was appointed archbishop of St. Louis in 2003 and served there until last June,

when Pope Benedict XVI appointed him prefect of the Apostolic Signatura (the Church's "Supreme Court" of Canon Law).

In his original letter, then-Bishop Burke suggested the shrine be dedicated to Mary under her title Our Lady of Fatima. But this proposal underwent a transformation in 1999, when Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic exhortation titled *Ecclesia in America* (*The Church in America*).

In that document, presented during the pope's apostolic visit to Mexico City, John Paul II called Our Lady of Guadalupe the "Patroness of all America and Star of the first and new evangelization." It was this phrase that captured Bishop Burke's attention, and he began to wonder if he should rethink the focus of the shrine.

SPREADING DEVOTION

Although some people think of devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe as an exclusively Mexican tradition, its popularity has greatly increased throughout North America in recent years. This is partly due to the fact that Pope John Paul II made four separate visits to the basilica in Mexico

then canonizing St. Juan Diego.

There have been no polls to indicate how many U.S. or Canadian citizens honor Our Lady of Guadalupe. Nor are there statistics regarding what percent of those who profess a devotion to her are Hispanic, or who see her in her proper role — that is, not as some kind of goddess but as the Mother of Christ.

Nevertheless, many have seen evidence of renewed and widespread devotion with their own eyes. And seeing Our Lady's image face-to-face is what convinced Archbishop Burke to build the shrine in La Crosse in her honor. After reading *Ecclesia in America*, he studied more about Mary's apparitions to St. Juan Diego. The more he read, the more he was impressed. Finally, he went on a pilgrimage to the basilica in Mexico City. All it took to clinch his decision was one look at St. Juan Diego's *tilma*, the cactus-fiber cloak imprinted with the miraculous image of Mary.

"I had the sense of the Mother of God actually looking at me," said Archbishop Burke. In fact, it seemed as if Mary was "mystically embracing" him. From then on, he decided to dedicate the shrine in La Crosse to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

MOTHER OF MERCY

According to Dr. Mark Miravalle, a theology professor at Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio and a member of St. Catherine Council 4590 in Hopedale, one of Mary's key messages to Juan Diego is that she is our merciful mother. "First, she is a mother in the order of grace," he said.

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City, the most to any non-Italian shrine. Two of those trips, in 1990 and 2002, involved beatifying and



OUR LADY'S SHRINE

After the groundbreaking for the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, Wis., in 2001, a pilgrim center and a votive chapel were the first buildings to be erected. Construction on the church began in 2004 and was completed last summer. The shrine also features a number of devotional areas, including an outdoor Stations of the Cross, a rosary walk and a memorial to the unborn. A Fourth Degree honor guard of more than 25 Knights was present for



the four-hour Mass of Dedication, celebrated by Archbishop Raymond L. Burke July 31. For more information about the shrine, visit www.guadalupe Shrine.org.

"The world needs a mother and she says, 'I am that mother for you.'"

The Aztec culture into which Juan Diego was born was "one of the most Satanic in history," according to Miravalle. For instance, in 1487, only 44 years before Mary appeared to Juan Diego, the Aztecs sacrificed an estimated 80,000 human victims to reconsecrate the Great Pyramid of Tenochtitlan.

The Spaniards brought Franciscan and Dominican missionaries with them when they arrived in 1519, and again when Cortéz arrived in 1521. Not only did the missionaries have to face the brutality of the Aztec culture, they also had to deal with the Spaniards' mistreatment of the indigenous people and with infighting between their religious communities. In other words, evangelizing the New World was slow, hard work.

It was into this, Miravalle said, that Mary came and declared, "I am your merciful mother." That mercy and the beauty of her face drew so many from all over the land that within eight years, nine million of Mexico's native inhabitants had been

baptized. Aside from the Resurrection itself, there has never been an evangelistic event like it in Church history.

According to Miravalle, there is now evidence showing that the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe even played an important role in Europe. Just 40 years after Mary first appeared to Juan Diego, Don Juan of Austria carried an image on his ship as he led the Christian naval forces against the Turks in the decisive Battle of Lepanto.

Our Lady 'brought reconciliation between Europeans and the native people, despite their differences.'

Today, Our Lady of Guadalupe is bringing God's mercy into yet another diabolical culture — the culture of death. The Guadalupe image, which uniquely depicts Mary as pregnant, is being advanced in the battle for life.

Indeed, "She is the queen of that battle," Miravalle said.

Perhaps it was no coincidence that John Paul II published *Ecclesia in America*, extolling Our Lady of Guadalupe as "Mother and Evangelizer of America," on Jan. 22 — the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*.

In fact, missionary images of Our Lady of Guadalupe are often brought to peaceful demonstrations outside abortion clinics. Many believe that the presence of Our Lady's image has contributed to the closing of some such clinics.

BEYOND BORDERS

The message and image of Our Lady of Guadalupe continues to change the lives of millions of people.

Of course, the people of Mexico still carry a very profound love for Our Lady. Native pilgrims to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City often travel to the site barefoot and traverse the basilica's plaza on their knees. At least 30 Masses are celebrated there every day.

In a homily on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Dec. 12, 2006, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted of Phoenix observed that Our Lady "brought reconciliation between Europeans and the native people, despite their difference in language, culture, customs and so much more." Moreover, some have pointed out that when Mary said to Juan Diego she is the mother of "all the inhabitants on this land," there were no international borders in the New World.

When the idea for the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse was first conceived, it was intended primarily to be a place of pilgrimage for the diocese and the surrounding area. However, since its completion and dedication last summer, the shrine has attracted pilgrims from far and wide.

Indeed, Our Lady of Guadalupe, as John Paul said in his *Ecclesia in America*, is truly "Queen of all America." ■

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