

Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico

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To speak of Our Lady of Guadalupe, is to speak of hope, for she said to each and every human being: "My child, do not let anything afflict you. Am I not here, I who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy?" (Nican Mopohua, verse 119, a 16th century document written in the native Nahuatl language).

Our Lady of Guadalupe chose to reveal herself to humanity through a humble Indian, Juan Diego Cuahatlatoatzin, who was canonized by John Paul II on July 31st, 2002. Known as "La Morenita" (The Little Black Madonna), Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego in December of 1531 on the Tepeyac Hill, in the heart of Mexico. It is an event that is recognized not only by popular tradition, but also by a historical document written in the Nahuatl language of the Aztecs called "Nican Mopohua". The "Nican Mopohua", which means "Here it is told", describes the five apparitions of Our Lady to Juan Diego, as well as the miraculous image that was imprinted on his "tilma" -- the common peasant cloak made of agave fibers.

In one of the apparitions, the Blessed Virgin Mary asked Juan Diego to visit the bishop of Mexico, Juan de Zumarraga, to ask him to build a chapel in her honor on the summit of the hill. Skeptical, the bishop asked for a sign from heaven to ensure the truthfulness of this petition that Mary had sent through her humble servant. Juan Diego returned to the Blessed Virgin Mary and reported the bishop's request. She said him: "Very well, return here tomorrow, and you can take to the Bishop the sign he has requested." And so, Our Lady asked Juan Diego to go to the summit of the Tepeyac Hill to gather flowers and then to bring them to her.

This took place on December 11th, in the middle of winter, and Tepeyac is 2,500 meters above sea level. Nevertheless, where once existed but thistles and thorns, Juan Diego found magnificent flowers that were typical of the Castile Region, in particular, roses that shined with dew drops. He picked some of them and placed them in his poncho, then descended the hill to return to Mary. Our Lady took the flowers from Juan Diego, and arranged them in his tunic; she told him, "My son, these different kinds of flowers are the proof, the sign, that you will take to the Bishop."

The Indian went back to the bishop's palace and told him that Our Lady had asked him to gather flowers so as to give the bishop the sign that he had wanted. Then, Juan Diego unfolded his tunic before the bishop: the flowers fell to the ground, and on his tunic appeared the image of Mary imprinted there, depicted with her hands folded, her eyes lowered and a veil spangled with 46 golden stars. The figure, who is represented with child, has a very gentle

and radiant face, a tender expression and such a human and supernatural purity that the bishop and those present, overwhelmed, knelt down. Bishop Zumarraga asked for Mary's forgiveness for not having immediately attended to her request, and at once ordered the construction of the shrine for Our Lady of Guadalupe.

For more than 470 years, the image imprinted on Juan Diego's cloak -- a fabric that would normally deteriorate in about 20 years -- has inexplicably been preserved in its original state. The miracle was acknowledged after a scientific examination, and was confirmed by the Catholic Church with Juan Diego's canonization.

Today at the Shrine of Guadalupe, also called "La Villa", the faithful venerate the intact image of Our Lady that was imprinted on both sides of the plant-fiber fabric. The pigments of its colors have never been identified, and, though painted with four different techniques, the portrait shows no signs that a paintbrush was used. With folded hands, the Virgin appears to be profoundly meditating in prayer. Her features are of a mestiza girl, and a flower with four petals -- symbolizing divinity and evoking the expectation of Christ's return -- is placed on her womb, from which emanates an intense light, forming a brilliant halo.

Each year "La Villa" welcomes some 19 million pilgrims. And on December 12th, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, approximately 95,000 people from around the world visit the shrine. "La Morenita" was declared "Patroness of America" by Pius XII and "Empress of America" by John Paul II. Since 1531, the evangelization of America has been entrusted to her.

Prayer :

*Blessed Virgin of Guadalupe,
I pray, in the name of all my brothers of the world,
that you bless and protect us;
grant us a sign of your love and goodness,
and receive our prayers...*

*Our Lady of Guadalupe,
who at the time of the heavenly apparitions on the Tepeyac Hill,
promised your love, understanding and help
to all those who love you and come to you
with their needs and afflictions,
and who promised to be understanding and to help relieve
our miseries, sorrows and sufferings.
Amen.*