

Our Lady of Guadalupe Speaks

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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?*

“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?”

These words—spoken to Juan Diego 480 years ago in Mexico—have to be the most comforting words ever spoken by the Virgin Mary in any of her apparitions.

Who does not have fear? Who is not distressed by illness or pain? Who is spared anxiety or stress?

Yet, in all of these things, the Mother of God asks us to turn to her in love, in prayer, in complete trust and confidence.

Our Lady of Guadalupe first appeared to Juan Diego in the year 1531 on December 9.

Within four days, Mary appeared to her humble servant Juan a total of four times, leading to the image she left of herself on Juan Diego's tilma. Made from the cactus plant, the tilma should have disintegrated in 20 years. That was four and one-half centuries ago!

“This is Mary's only apparition in the world where she left a picture of herself. Mary left part of Heaven on earth,” states Mary Therese Helmueller of Guadalupe Travel in St. Paul, Minnesota, which takes pilgrimages twice a year to Mexico City.

The picture of Our Lady was so meaningful to the native Indians that they turned in amazing numbers from their Aztec worship and human sacrifices to adopt the Christian religion. The number of conversions totaled 8,000,000 in just eight years.

The image spoke clearly to the Indians. “She was standing before the sun, so she was stronger than the sun. She stood on the moon, so she was greater than the moon,” said Fr. John Meyers, spiritual director of Guadalupe Travel's pilgrimages. This picture of Mary was a powerful message to the Indians, who had deified the sun and moon.

He also pointed out that the stars on the Virgin Mary's mantle are in the same position as the major stars appeared in the heavens on the night of December 12, 1531.

She also had a cross on her neck, representing Christianity and her hands are in prayer. When the natives saw all of this revealed through a fellow Indian, they knew what to do. They converted!

When Juan Diego first went to Bishop Juan Zumarraga carrying roses in his tilma, Juan was unaware of the fact that the bishop had, in prayer, asked the Virgin Mary for Castilian roses, which didn't even grow in Mexico “as a sign that the Franciscans should keep up their work trying to get the natives to convert,” added Father Meyers, also a Franciscan.

The Franciscans had arrived seven years earlier and conversions had gone slowly, but one of them was Juan Diego, the one Mary called "Juanito, my son, dearest of my sons."

Juan walked many miles to attend daily mass and on December 9, 1531 as he crossed Tepeyac Hill he heard blissful harmony and music coming from the top of Tepeyac Hill. Naturally curious, he climbed to the top and saw a lady of overpowering brilliance and beauty.

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She asked Juan to tell the Bishop of Mexico City to build a temple on Tepeyac Hill.

Juan did his best, but after seeing the bishop, he felt he had failed and went back to the Virgin Mary on Tepeyac Hill and suggested she get somebody more important for the job of telling the bishop what she wanted done.

Mary told Juan she has many servants and messengers and it was he whom she wanted to undertake this important mission.

On his second try at the bishop's residence, Juan had to wear the servants' resistance down in order to see Bishop Zumurruga again.

After asking Juan Diego many questions, Bishop Zumurruga told Juan that he would build a temple if the Lady gave him a sign she was from Heaven. Juan wondered aloud what kind of sign did the bishop want.

That evening Juan went to see his uncle Juan Bernardino and was startled to find him seriously ill with cocolixtle, a fever that took the lives of almost all of its victims. Juan knew his uncle was dying and went early the next morning to fetch a priest.

Upon approaching Tepeyac Hill, he went around the other side, hoping to avoid the Virgin Mary. He was in too much of a hurry to get a priest for his dying uncle. He didn't have time to talk.

Then Juan saw Mary coming down from the side of the hill. After intercepting Juan, she asked him where he was going.

Juan explained how ill his dear uncle was and that he was going to get a priest to hear his uncle's last confession and to administer the last rites.

Then Mary spoke great words of compassion and tenderness, the words first quoted at the beginning of this article. Then, she went to the heart of Juan Diego's concern. "Do not let the illness of your uncle worry you because he is not going to die of his sickness. At this very

moment, he is cured,” the Virgin Mary assured Juan, who later learned from his uncle that the Virgin Mary appeared to him too and cured him.

The Virgin Mary, to provide the sign requested by the bishop, told Juan to go to the top of the hill and gather the flowers he would find growing there. Juan knew nothing grew on the top of that hill except weeds, thistles, bushes and cactus—but he dutifully went up there and was surprised to find beautiful roses and other flowers in full bloom.

He picked the flowers, filling his tilma, using it like an apron. He went back down the hill to the Virgin Mary, who rearranged them in the tilma and told Juan not to let anyone see what was inside his tilma until he was in the bishop’s presence.

Juan did as he was told and after some delay, he convinced the servants that he should be allowed to see the bishop.

Juan then told everything to the bishop and at the end of his story, he released the ends of his tilma. The flowers, including the Castilian roses the bishop had prayed for, cascaded to the floor.

Bishop Zumarraga knew it was the sign he had asked for from the Blessed Virgin Mary. Filled with awe and wonder, the bishop looked up at the tilma and at that instant the glorious image of Mary appeared on it.

Juan Diego was as amazed as anyone else. Here was a picture of the lady he saw on his tilma!

Ordinarily, when one is close to a painting, the detail is sharper than from a distance....The plan of this holy picture is so singular, so perfectly accomplished and so manifestly marvelous that we hold it for certain that anyone who has any knowledge whatever of our art must, on seeing it, at once declare it to be a miraculous portrait.

“To me, the strangest thing (about the image on the tilma) is this: ordinarily, when one is close to a painting, the detail is sharper than from a distance. But with the holy portrait, this isn’t so. You can scarcely see the stars in her robe, yet they are dazzling from a distance... (up close) her robe is not the greenish-blue one sees from a distance, but a much bluer and darkish blue. The pink of her gown is very pale close up, but very rosy at some distance,” stated the late American author Coley Taylor, quoted in the best book one can find on Our Lady of Guadalupe. It is written by Francis Johnston and called: “The Wonder of Guadalupe” published by TAN Books and Publishers in Rockford, Illinois. Many of those quoted here are from Johnston’s book.

The name Guadalupe comes from what Juan’s uncle related when he said she told him she was to be known as Our Lady of Guadalupe. At least that’s what it sounded like to the bishop, who of course was familiar with a shrine to Our Lady in Guadalupe, Spain.

In a very short time, Christianity replaced the Aztec religion. The Indians were frankly tickled pink that the Mother of God chose an Indian to appear to, and they were quick to convert after gazing at the miraculous image.

Over the years, the tilma has been touched by thousands, survived the smoke of many thousands of candles, survived acid accidentally spilled on the image by a workman cleaning the frame holding the tilma, and survived a bomb explosion directly beneath it (not even the glass was cracked although a brass crucifix was bent, stained glass windows in the church shattered and masonry crumbled).

In the year 1736, Mexico was ravaged by typhus, which claimed 700,000 lives. The people turned in prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe and the government—yes, the government—asked the clergy to proclaim her National Patroness of Mexico, which was done in solemn ceremonies on May 26, 1737. The typhus plague immediately ended.

The most famous painter in Mexico at the time was Miguel Cabrera, who after examining the sacred image, declared, “The plan of this holy picture is so singular, so perfectly accomplished and so manifestly marvelous that we hold it for certain that anyone who has any knowledge whatever of our art must, on seeing it, at once declare it to be a miraculous portrait.”

How miraculous came to light in this century! In one eye, a professional photographer found an image of Juan Diego, confirmed as a likeness of Juan from an old painting. In the other eye, you can also see—in a picture blown up 25 times—two other images besides Juan Diego. These are believed to be Bishop Don Sebastian Ramirez Fuenleal and Juan Gonzales, the interpreter.

The three men were shown in a 1533 painting discovered in 1960 during restoration of the old 1622 church.

Therefore, this portrait, this picture of Mary, in turn took a picture of Juan Diego and two others, as reflected in her eyes as the three first gazed at the wondrous tilma. Bishop Zumarraga, who is not shown, is believed to have been behind the tilma, holding it for Juan and the others to see.

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Over the years, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been elevated in stature to the rank equal to St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome, ranking second in importance only to St. Peter's.

Many titles have been added to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Of the 45 popes since 1531, 25 have issued decrees concerning Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Pope Pius XII proclaimed her Empress of All the Americas. Pope John XXIII proclaimed a Marian year of Our Lady of Guadalupe from December 12, 1960 to the same date in 1961, and called her “Mother of the Americas.”

Pope Paul VI presented a golden rose to the Basilica, an honor only accorded to the basilicas at Lourdes and Fatima, the two great Marian shrines in Europe which draw millions of pilgrims every year.

But Our Lady of Guadalupe's Basilica in Mexico City has to be the greatest Marian shrine from two aspects: over 20,000,000 go there every year (some 2 to 3 million arrive for her December 12 feast day annually) and it is the only place where Mary actually left a portrait, a picture, of herself.

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The coloring of this picture is so unique that a German Nobel Prize winner in chemistry, Richard Kuhn, said after examining fibers from the image that there was no coloring of any kind in the fibers. The materials used to produce what resembled colors were unknown to science, being neither animal, vegetable or mineral dyes. That statement was made by Kuhn 55 years ago.

In 1979, Professor Phillip Callahan of the University of Florida, said of the image, "It may seem strange for a scientist to say this but as far as I'm concerned the original picture is miraculous."

Yes, the 1531 image cannot be explained by science. Powerful lenses have even revealed that Mary's face in the image utilizes the coarse weave of the tilma so precisely as to give depth to her face.

Pope John Paul II, who has been a pilgrim to Mexico City twice, sums up what many feel when he said he feels drawn to her picture.

For her December 12 feast day, millions are drawn to the basilica opened in 1979 (the old one is cracked and sinking). Most who come are poor peasants. Many approach the basilica on their knees. Hundreds arrive by bicycle. Tens of thousands arrive in crowded trucks, huddled together. Others walk or take public transportation. On the night of the feast day, many thousands sleep outside the basilica—only a grass mat, blanket or piece of cardboard separating them from the cold concrete.

Seldom is such faith seen anywhere in the world.

They come from all over Mexico—and other parts of the world—to be with, pray to, and look upon Our Lady of Guadalupe.

When you look at her, you know the image is from Heaven. When you look at the people (10,000 can crowd into the basilica) you know that they too are aware that this sacred image from Heaven is truly a picture of Our Mother—and that she is here to help them!

In conclusion, here is a special prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe:

Dear Mother, we love you. We thank you for your promise to help us in our need. We trust in your love that dries our tears and comforts us. Teach us to find our peace in your Son, Jesus, and bless us every day of our lives.

Help us to build a shrine in our hearts. Make it as beautiful as the one built for you on the Mount of Tepeyac. A shrine full of trust, hope and love of Jesus growing stronger each day.

Mary, you have chosen to remain with us by giving us your most wonderful and holy self-image on Juan Diego's cloak. May we feel your loving presence as we look upon your face. Like Juan, give us the courage to bring your message of hope to everyone.

You are our Mother and our inspiration. Hear our prayers and answer us. Amen.