

“Listen and let it penetrate your heart...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? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?” (Our Lady’s words to her servant Juan Diego.)

The First Apparition

Juan Diego awoke before sunrise. It was Saturday, Our Lady’s day, the ninth of December, the first day in the Octave of the Immaculate Conception, 1531, and quite cold in the mountains of Mexico at that time of year. Wrapping his cloak or tilma about him Juan set out alone from his new home in Tolpetlac to the neighboring village of Tlatelolco, a suburb of Tenochtitlan, six miles south. He was on his way to Mass, which he had faithfully attended every Saturday and Sunday since his conversion six years before. It was a long journey for anyone to make two days in a row; that’s twenty-four miles of walking, and his aging limbs were beginning to feel the toll. The trip seemed so much longer since his wife and traveling companion, Maria Lucia, had died two years ago. Now he walked the road alone. But being alone had its advantages; it gave him time to think about and talk to God. The good friars had taught him well how to do that.

It was still dusky, not too far from dawn, as he approached Tepeyac hill. Here not so long ago stood the gory temple of the Aztecs’ mother goddess. It was just a memory now as were all their false deities. But Juan’s thoughts were elsewhere as he shuffled along on his way to Mass; the kind Fathers expected him to know his catechism lesson and these eternal truths preoccupied his mind.

Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by music, very wonderful music, descending from atop the slope of the hill. It sounded to him like a mellifluous chirping of sweetly singing birds. It was a melody such as he had never heard. The tones began to grow more enchanting, filling the air around him and so enrapturing his soul that he began to doubt whether it was possible for a man in this fragile life to relish such exquisite harmony and remain in the flesh. “Is it I,” he wondered, “who have this good fortune to hear what I hear? Or am I perhaps only dreaming? Where am I? . . . Is this perchance the earthly Paradise hidden from the eyes of men?” The ravished Indian squinted his eyes to scan the hilltop, when to his utter astonishment, a cloud glowing with dazzling whiteness appeared just above the crest, while a magnificent rainbow formed by its resplendent rays emblazoned everything around it. Then, abruptly, the celestial singing ceased. A voice was heard from within the cloud. It was the voice of a young woman, a tender voice, calling his name most affectionately, “Juanito, Juan Dieguito.”



Our Lady spoke to her humble protégé in his own Nahuatl tongue. In that language the form of address used by the woman had a significance more singularly intimate than any expression English or Spanish could convey. The exact sound that met the Indian’s ears was “Juantzin, Juan Diegotzin.” It was an endearing expression, reverently diminutive, that a fond mother would use for her child. English would render it: “Dear little Juan.” That same voice beckons each of us with an identical tone of affection. If only more men would open their hearts to hear the call, what joy it would bring into their lives!

Totally perplexed, the fifty seven year old Juanito clambered up the rocky incline to see who it was who so sweetly addressed him. Strangely though, there was no fear in him; he was supremely confident, and intoxicated with exuberance. As he reached the summit, the voice gently bade him draw near. Doing so, he found himself face to face with a woman of incomparable loveliness, whom he described simply as “a most

beautiful lady.” Her garments shone so brilliantly that the entire mountain was transformed by the reflection of her glory. The rocks became as precious gold; the earth sparkled like emeralds and multi-colored jewels; even the shrubs and prickly pears were splattered with a sheet of color, as if their thorns had been changed into stained glass. She was young, perhaps fourteen, her expression most affable and encouraging. She motioned Juan to come closer. Advancing a step or two he sank to his knees, overwhelmed by the loveliness of the vision.

The Lady spoke, ” My son, Juan Diego, whom I tenderly love as a little one and weak, where are you going?”

And he replied, “My holy one, my Lady, my Mistress, I am on my way to your house at Tlatelolco; I go in pursuit of the holy things which our priests teach us.” His holy one, the noble Lady, then revealed her will saying:

“Know my son, my much beloved, that I am the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God who is the Author of life, the Creator of all things, the Lord of heaven and earth, present everywhere. And it is my wish that here, there be raised to me a temple in which, as a loving mother to thee and those like thee, I shall show my tender clemency and the compassion I feel for the natives and for those who love and seek me, for all who implore my protection, who call on me in their labors and afflictions: and in which I shall hear their weeping and their supplications that I may give them consolation and relief. That my will may have its effect, thou must go to the city of Mexico and to the palace of the bishop who resides there, to tell him that I have sent thee and that I wish a temple to be raised to me in this place. Thou shalt report what thou hast seen and heard, and be assured that I will repay what thou dost for me in the charge I give thee: for I will make thee great and renowned. Now thou hast heard, son, my wish. Go in peace. . . employ all of the strength thou art able.”

Juan bowed low in humble obeisance and said, “I go, I go, my most noble Lady and Mistress, to do as a humble servant what you have ordered. Farewell.”

After Juan had spoken to Our Lady, he straight-away set out on his mission, as a most obedient son, and took the road leading directly to Mexico. Juan never paused to weigh the pros and cons of his own insufficiency; he just did what he was commanded, and he acted promptly; any obstacles he would face when and where they came. This past December 12 [1981] marked the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe to the humble Aztec Indian Juan Diego on Tepeyac hill near Mexico City.

Her message was beautiful and simple. She told him that she wanted a church to be built in her honor on this hill, wherein she would receive and compassionately console all her suffering children. For this purpose she sent Juan Diego to the Bishop of Mexico, the Friar Minor, Don Juan de Zumarraga, to present to him her request. Though he was most faithful in his mission, the lowly messenger was not believed. Finally, Our Lady gave him a sign to take to the Bishop, a bouquet of flowers that she had caused to spring miraculously from the hilltop’s frozen winter soil. And, to leave absolutely no doubt that it was indeed she, the Mother of God, who requested this church, she left imprinted on the face of the Indian’s cloak, in which as an apron he had carried the miraculous sign into the prelate’s presence, a full length color portrait of herself, just as the Indian had seen her. The tilma and its image can be seen to this very day in the cathedral of Mexico City.

Every year up to twenty million pilgrims come to Mexico’s capital from all over the world to see and pray to Our Lady before her miraculous picture. Her shrine attracts every type of visitor imaginable, from chest-beating penitents to cold sophisticated worldlings; from irreverent gum smackers in tight jeans to the simple ordinary worshiper. They all come, representing a vast cross-section of humanity, all the time, in a never-ending stream. Some approach for hundreds of yards on their knees with arms outstretched in a posture of penance. Others, who have not such a visible conviction, at least come in prayer, perhaps reciting the Rosary, to prepare for their climactic encounter. Too many, sad to say, approach as mere tourists with no faith and no love, like orphans who do not want a mother. But here Our Lady has made herself available to all, the just and the unjust, to be loved or just viewed. And isn’t it beautiful that she is always there, faithful to her promise to her “dear little one,” Juan Diego, even after four and a half centuries.

Guadalupe is the most frequented Marian shrine in the whole world. The Blessed Virgin receives here three times more pilgrims than she does even at Lourdes. Is it because of the cures? No.... There are cures, but that isn’t why so many are drawn here. There’s another reason, a more wonderful one, that gives Guadalupe such a compelling magnetism. It is the sense of *Our Lady’s presence*.

There is a very real communication of hearts at Guadalupe. It is the heart of a sinless Mother seeking out the love of her children and offering her maternal protection. She, the Mother of God, wants to be known and loved by men so that she can lead them to her Son. She wants to be known for what she truly is. Now Mary knows her children only too well ... but her children do not and cannot know her well enough, for there is so much to know about her that the pursuit would exhaust a whole lifetime of effort. But we must try. "They that explain me shall have life," the Scriptures say of Mary in the Book of Wisdom. So, in the vehemence of her tender love, those four centuries ago, she left for the world a portrait of herself painted with brushes "not of this earth." In this marvelous picture-it cannot be called a painting, for there were no paints involved-one can see for himself what the most beautiful creature God ever created looks like.

Then there is the canvas the Queen of Heaven chose for her portrait, the tilma of Juan Diego, a rough burlap-type cloak that the lower-class Indians wore draped over their shoulders, and ankle-length. Having been poor in her mortal life, the Mother of God did not disdain such a canvas, for by it she would confound the laws of science. Every artist who has examined the tilma has affirmed that there simply is no way short of a miracle for such an exquisite picture to have been painted on such a coarse and porous surface. Furthermore, the tilma itself, made from cactus fibers, should have fallen apart, naturally speaking, twenty or thirty years at most after it was made. Nevertheless, long defying the laws of decomposition, it hangs together to this very day. Needless to say, if the canvas has been miraculously preserved, so has the image. The colors are still as fresh and vivid as when they first appeared, despite the natural corroding effect of black smoke, which for a century arose before it from hundreds of burning vigil lights (it wasn't until 1647 that the precious relic was put under glass), and despite the accidental spilling of a bottle of nitric acid across its surface by a workman in 1791.

The Mexicans are an extremely religious people. And they should be. After all, Pope Benedict XIV said, when a copy of the miraculous picture was first shown to him in 1754, "Non fecit taliter omni nationi," "God has not done in like manner to every nation," applying to the Mexicans this verse from Psalm 147.

And the cause of such holiness-to be seen more in the heart of the country than in the border cities-is none other than Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe. Her coming in 1531 was the birth of Mexico. That is why the secret forces of Masonry, in their efforts to destroy the Catholic principles upon which this nation rose up, have attempted with no success to destroy the Sacred Image. But neither with bombs, as was attempted during the Calles persecution in 1921, nor with the invectives of the liberal press, were they able to defeat the Virgin. In fact, as experience has taught her enemies, the more she is attacked, the more strongly will her children rise up in her defense.

Mexico and Our Lady of Guadalupe go together like the sun and its rays. You can't separate the two. She is enthroned in her country everywhere you turn. Whether you are in a grand cathedral, a busy market place, or a taxi-cab, you will always find her. She is the very air the Mexicans breathe. And what is even more beautiful is the way she sweetly reigns in the Mexican home. Nothing is more charming, more heart warming, than to see the joy, peace, modesty and cleanliness that come as second nature to a typical Catholic Mexican family. Here under her watchful eye all the bad fruits of worldliness and vice dare not appear. Instead, respect for parents, love for children, pleasant manners, tidiness, the modesty of the women, the purity of the men, the holy joy of all, can be seen in everything they do: in the way they work, in the way they entertain one another, in the way they eat their meals, and in the way they pray. Again the reason for such a blessing is their love for Our Lady of Guadalupe. "Come the day," admitted the skeptic Altimirano, "on which the Virgin of Guadalupe is no longer venerated, and you have the sign that the very name of Mexico has disappeared from the catalogue of nations!"

The Stage

Bishop Juan de Zumarraga was to play a very crucial role in our story. Transplanted from his quiet monastery in Abrojo, Spain, where he was the acting prior, at the request of his friend the Emperor Charles V, who was desperately in need of an intelligent and courageous prelate to govern the Church in his newly acquired kingdoms across the ocean, the accomplished Franciscan took up his residence in Mexico City in 1527. King Charles had chosen a good man for the job. In just thirty years (with the help of Our Lady and Juan Diego) the amazing friar had this land of barbaric paganism so transformed into a peaceful Christian society that one would think that the kingship of Christ had already been established there for centuries. It is true that the genius of Cortez can hardly be overlooked in this transformation, but the Conqueror was mainly that a

conqueror. Zumarraga did the building. And it wasn't easy.

The main thrust of the good Bishop's programs was directed toward the conversion and well-being of the Indians, without neglecting the spiritual needs of the Spaniards. At that time, the plight of the natives was intolerable. A great many of them had been forcibly separated from their families and condemned to harsh slave labor in the mines. Such conditions had caused the afflicted Indians to resent their conquerors even more than they did the tyranny of Montezuma. This resentment led to angry thoughts of rebellion, and soon an uprising seemed to be imminent. This was the situation Zumarraga was faced with as he took over his see. Every night the holy man of God begged the Court of Heaven to prevent a civil war that would end only in death and loss of soul for hundreds of thousands of unconverted natives. And since he was a man already intimate with the Mother of God, he secretly asked her to acknowledge her reception of his prayer by sending him roses from Castile.

A man of prayer, he was also a man of action. He used every means at his disposal to defend the Indians' rights. Like St. Ignatius, he prayed as if everything depended on God and he worked as if everything depended on him. His loud and clear denunciations from the pulpit finally brought him into conflict with the president of the governing Audiencia Don Nune de Guzman, whose policy had been not only to enslave the natives but to imprison anyone who defended them. Some priests found themselves physically dragged from their pulpits and imprisoned for daring to criticize the dictator's abuses.

In 1530, the situation was so bad that Zumarraga had to put the entire city under interdict, thus suspending the administration of the sacraments to the laity, except in the case of the dying. In the ages of faith such measures moved mountains. So, too, in this crisis it proved effective, and the cruel overlords were pressured by the Church into restoring the basic rights of the natives. Later that year there were a few more turns for the better: Guzman was removed from office by the king; the Audiencia was disbanded; and Bishop Fuenleal, a wise and just man, was sent from the mother country to rule the colony as its governor.

Meanwhile, in the midst of this turbulence, the missionaries who had fanned out across the continent were busy instructing in the truths of the Catholic Faith whatever Indians would listen to them. One of the biggest handicaps to winning converts among these pagans was their widespread practice of polygamy. A century later the Jesuits in North America would encounter the same problem. At that time, however, very few among the adult Aztecs were willing to embrace a marriage which would put any restraints on their habitual licentiousness. But there were exceptions. And some very inspiring ones. One of these was Cuauhtlatohuac, who with his one wife lived twelve miles north of the capital. When this chaste couple first heard the word of God, their hearts proved most fertile to receive it. It is related by those who knew them that after their conversion, by mutual consent, they agreed to live as brother and sister and imitate the chastity of the friars from whom they had received this most wonderful religion. Needless to say, Cuauhtlatohuac was happy to change his name; he was baptized Juan Diego and his little wife took the name Maria Lucia. Juan was fifty-one years old when he was reborn in Christ. The year was 1525, just four years after the Conquest.

Background

The natives of Mexico are known in history as the Aztecs. They were a warlike people who migrated sometime around the fourteenth century from the north into the warmer climate zone. Before that time, they have no history, except what one can learn from their mythical legends. Having subjugated the surrounding tribes with the military superiority of a centrally organized army, they settled down in and around a lake region they called Tenochtitlan, out of which Mexico City arose.

When the Spaniards arrived in 1519 the Aztec Empire was outwardly impressive, but inwardly faltering under the cruel tyranny of Montezuma II, a superstitious, ill-fated man, whom the people believed to be a descendant of the gods. His subjects carried their error to such an extreme that their heavenly sovereign's august feet were not allowed to be contaminated by the earth, so they carried the king wherever he went.

Far worse than this perverse concept of regality was the unspeakable cruelty, inspired by Satan, which prompted them to appease their stone divinities with human blood. Hundreds, sometimes thousands of victims, usually slaves or prisoners of war, were dragged daily up the temple stairs to the altar of sacrifice, where they had their hearts torn out by hooded priests, and offered to some god or goddess. Francis Johnston

in his book, *_The Wonder of Guadalupe_*, offers insight into their perverted motivation:

“... the Aztecs felt themselves under a compelling obligation to offer human sacrifice to these gods either in atonement for some physical calamity, such as pestilence or earthquake, or to forestall an unexpected misfortune. For instance, since the Aztecs regarded themselves as the ‘people of the sun’, they felt driven to supply this divinity with a regular nourishment of human blood, for fear that he might no longer appear on the horizon.” In their frenzied derangement they thought that, since men were created by the blood of the gods, then they must return that blood or the gods would die.

At least, they had a reason for their insanity. Today when our ‘Christian’ civilization is allowing ‘hooded priests’ in white doctors’ robes to murder one and a half million helpless infants every year in our hospitals for no other reason than a diabolical selfishness that prefers nice cars and fashionable clothes to children, one wonders which society is the more corrupt. If God punished the pagans so terribly for this crime, imagine what He is going to do to our ‘Christian’ society that dares to hypocritically call itself not only civilized but ‘under God’. Woe to the leaders of our country who are sanctioning this slaughter, and more than that, woe to the leaders of the Church in America who do not constantly condemn those who are the cause of this bloodshed! We would do well to pray that God, in His mercy, may send us a modern-day Hernando Cortez so that he might put an end to this horrible slaughter of our own Innocents and deal with these sophisticated murderers as they have so mercilessly dealt with our helpless children.

The Aztecs had gods for almost every prominent reality in the world about them and inside them: that is, from the sun and moon above, to the passions within. In view of what was to come, it is worth mentioning here the goddess of motherhood, a gruesomely bloodthirsty monster, whose temple stood on a hill, six miles north of the capital, called Tepeyac. Her statue is preserved today in the Museum of Mexico City. A mass of writhing snakes encompasses her head. Her sightless eyes betray the unfathomable grief of the oppressed clientele who made her. At the inauguration of her shrine eighty thousand poor Indians were sacrificed.

The mightiest of all their horrid gods was Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered or Stone Serpent. No other symbol more befits the qualities of the devil than this deadly reptile. This is the form Satan took in the Garden of Paradise, when he first infected our race. So too, he will be in the same form (as God tells us in Genesis 3:15) when the woman shall crush his head. Thus, the arch-enemy of mankind, who had held these poor souls in such blind captivity for so many centuries, inspired his subjects to render him the highest adoration in the guise that so well befitted him.

When Montezuma ascended the throne in 1503 (wiping the dust from his feet for the last time), he did not do so without a certain portentous fear that had been bred into his superstitious mind. He felt uneasy in his glory. There was a pervading atmosphere of impending doom and all the Aztec nobility sensed it. Their soothsayers had been prophesying it for some time. The empire was destined to fall, . . . and soon. Like the possessed seer who walked about Jerusalem for four years (from 66-70 A.D.) bewailing the imminent fall of the city, as Christ had foretold, so the possessed wizards of these cultic barbarians of Mexico told tales of a powerful people from the East who, sailing upon the seas in monstrous vessels, would come and conquer their mighty empire.

It wasn’t long after Montezuma took his lofty seat that reports came that huge vessels with white flags had been sighted by their Mayan neighbors off the coasts of Yucatan. Then, there was the dream of his sister, the Princess Papantzin, who was later to be one of the first of her people to embrace Christianity. It seems that this royal prophetess, suffering from a severe illness, lapsed into a coma. The physicians, thinking her to be dead, were about to have her buried, when suddenly she awoke from such an awful fate and was heard screaming within her coffin. The woman, upon her release, told the astonished listeners of a mysterious vision she had seen: it seemed a luminous guide (doubtless an angel) led her to the ocean shore, where he pointed out to her through a fading mist, a large number of ships with black crosses painted on their sails. The heavenly guide, who she noticed had the same cross on his forehead, explained to her that these vessels were carrying men from a distant land who would conquer her people and bring them knowledge of the True God.

In the autumn of 1519, couriers arrived in the Aztec capital after a 240 mile journey from the east coast with an urgent message: gigantic sea vessels had been spotted off their shores! Montezuma studied the drawings (since the Aztecs had no written alphabet, all of their messages were done by the means of hieroglyphics); his eyes were fixed upon the sails of the vessels . . . *and the black crosses thereon!* That same year Hernando Cortez,

perhaps the greatest military leader of all time, landed on the Mexican shores at a place he appropriately named Vera Cruz (True Cross). Like the discoverer Christopher Columbus, the Conqueror Cortez was a very religious man. Though this cannot be said of all the Spaniards who made a name for themselves in the days of the conquistadors, it was true of a good many of them, and it was certainly true of Cortez, who either was or should have been their exemplar.

As the Hebrew army under Moses was sent by God to destroy those nations who were defiling the earth with the sin of human sacrifice, so too was Cortez sent by God to put an end to this same carnage in Mexico. The Conqueror had a divine mission, and a large number of natives willingly swelled his ranks-though an equal number violently assailed him-as he marched into the heart of unknown perils on his way to negotiate with the great and dreaded Montezuma.

The unforgettable story of that historic meeting, the Spaniards' kidnapping of the Aztec emperor, and his death at the hands of his own disenchanted people; Cortez' disastrous retreat from the city, where three-fourths of his eight hundred soldiers were slain in battle or seized for a more horrible fate in the temple of sacrifice; their astounding survival in the mountains on the roots of plants and barks of trees; their phenomenal recovery and rebuilding of forces, and at last their final three-day siege and victory over the Aztecs at Tenochtitlan on the thirteenth of August, 1521, is a truly epic tale uniquely captured in all its stark reality by the talented pen of the blind historian William Prescott.

Overnight the Aztecs saw their empire transformed. Temples stained with the blood of human sacrifice were torn down and churches rose up in their place. Here in the new temples would be offered the one sacrifice pleasing to God, the Sacrifice of the Mass, wherein by the hands of holy priests the One Victim would be mystically slain in an unbloody manner in atonement for our sins. Schools and hospitals appeared for the first time in that land, while barefooted friars lost no time in preaching the Faith to the conquered natives. This is the world in which Juan Diego grew up and was growing old. His pure heart rejoiced that the light had shone in the darkness, but he was sad that so few among his people comprehended it.

Juan Diego meets the Bishop

Let us pick up the story again now as we find Juan Diego walking along the main avenue in Mexico City, about to arrive at the Bishop's house with his urgent message. And *Juan*, the humble Indian, knelt down as a sign of reverence before Juan the Bishop. Both men were fully aware of their own nothingness before God, but this token of reverence the Bishop accepted in the Person of Him Whom his priesthood represented, Our Lord Jesus Christ. After Zumarraga greeted him courteously, Juan suppressed his nervousness and related all the wonderful things that had happened, repeating the message of the Lady exactly as he remembered it. To all this the prudent shepherd listened most kindly without giving any signs of credence. Then the Bishop asked Juan various questions, all of which he answered perfectly. Surely the Indian had his wits about him; there wasn't anything odd or singular in his behavior, nor was there any contradiction in his answers. Zumarraga was not the type of man to dismiss such matters lightly. He would need more time to check out the Indian's character. Perhaps too, the prelate was wondering if this were not some trick of the devil, from whose dark reign this land had only recently been expurgated. Deeply saddened by the obvious skepticism of the illustrious bishop, Juan rose to his feet, bowed, and took his leave. When he came to Tepeyac he found the beautiful Lady just as glorious as before, waiting for him at the summit. Kneeling before her he painfully acknowledged his failure:

“O little one, most dear, my Queen and most high Lady, I did what you told me. Though for a long time I was not let in to the Bishop, I finally saw him and gave him your message just as you ordered me. He listened to me with kindness and attention, but from what I noticed in him and from his questions. I gathered that he did not believe me, for he told me to come again that he might at leisure inquire into my affair and examine it more closely. He supposed that the temple you demanded was an imagination or whim of mine and not your will. I therefore beg of you to send some noble and influential person, someone worthy of respect, to whom credit ought to be given; for you see, O my Sovereign, that I am a poor serf, a mere lowly peasant, and that I am not fit for this embassy of yours. Pardon, O Queen, my boldness, if I have at all failed in the respect due to your greatness. Far be it from me to incur your indignation, or to displease you by my reply.”

Looking upon him with the greatest affection, the noble Lady smiled tenderly and said:

“Hear, much loved son, and understand that I am not without clients and servants to send, for I have many that I might employ if I wished, many that would do whatever they were ordered; but it much befits that thou undertake this affair and conduct it. My wish and desire has to be accomplished by thy means. So I ask thee, my son, and I order thee to go back in the morning, and see and speak to the Bishop. Tell him to erect for me the temple I demand, and say that she who sent thee is the Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God.”

At these words renewed vigor and confidence poured into Juan’s heart. He answered: “My Lady and my Child, I will not cause you affliction. I will gladly go to accomplish your will. I will not cease from striving ... So, tomorrow afternoon, when the sun is setting, I will come to give you a report concerning the reception of your message ... With this assurance let me take leave of you, my little Daughter, my Child, and my Lady. Rest quietly in the meanwhile until I come again.”

So the weary ambassador went home, cooked his supper, and apparently without mentioning to his uncle, with whom he was now living, anything of what had transpired, he went to bed. The next day, Sunday, Juan went to Mass and religious instruction, and afterwards set out down the road for his second encounter with the Bishop. As he walked along, thoughts rolled in and out of his mind as to what he could say to convince the doubting ecclesiastic; that is, if he even got in to see him. Those officials had looked extremely impatient with him yesterday; this time they might have him arrested, or even set the dogs on him. Soon, however, he found himself standing again in front of the episcopal palace and knocking at the gate. Though his worst fears did not materialize, still he was treated much more harshly than the day before; but with his persistent pleading, he wore down their resistance and was again allowed into the courtyard. Once inside, he was told to sit down and wait. He waited ... and waited ... drawing his tilma tightly about him, for it was very cold; one, two, three hours elapsed, and finally the majordomo called out his name; the Bishop would see him.

The man of God, having no idea that Juan had been waiting so long, was quite surprised to see the Indian back so soon and received him with his habitual courtesy. Instantly, Juan dropped to his knees and told the curious prelate that he had again seen and spoken to the Mother of God, and that she had demanded that the Bishop build her the desired church. Then, overcome by his own nervous intensity, the tears started down his cheeks, as he implored his Lordship to heed the noble Lady’s request.

Zumarraga was embarrassed at this passionate display, and gently consoling Juan, urged him to gain composure and answer his questions. What did the Lady look like? Who did she say she was? Where did she appear? On and on the Bishop went, till he was convinced that the man before him was neither dreaming nor hallucinating; he had seen a lady, but exactly who that lady was he couldn’t be sure; he needed proof that she was indeed who she said she was and not some illusion of the devil. They must have a sign, he told Juan; such an expensive and laborious undertaking as the construction of a church requires much more evidence that it is truly the Mother of God who asks for it.

“What kind of a sign?” Juan asked, totally unruffled by the request, “Name any sign at all and I will ask it of the Lady.” The Bishop paused for a moment and said, “Let the Lady herself decide it.”

And with that Juan was dismissed. Secretly Zumarraga had instructed two of his attendants to follow the Indian wherever he went, but from a safe and unobservable distance, so that they might see who it was with whom he was conversing.

Losing no time, Juan Diego hurried straight for Tepeyac Hill to inform his Mistress of the outcome of his second meeting. Not far behind him were the two spies. Yet when he came to the base of the hill, having there crossed over a certain stream, he instantly vanished from their sight. He was there one second, gone the next, and his pursuers were utterly befuddled as they vainly searched for him high and low. Giving up, they returned in great anger to the Bishop, accusing the Indian of some sort of wizardry, and suggested that if the deceiver should dare show his face again, he should be flogged.

Meanwhile the humble “deceiver” was rapt in ecstasy before the radiant beauty of God’s Mother. As Moses of old was taken up into the holy mountain, called alone by God to commune with Him “face to face” beyond the view of other men, so too Juan Dieguito was taken up alone into the holy hill of Tepeyac to commune face to face with the Holy Mother of God away from the sight of men. Prostrating himself before his heavenly Queen, with great anguish he poured out his heart. No one had believed him, though he had tried his utmost to convince them. Only a sign would move the Bishop to act upon the Lady’s request. So, as a last gesture to please

his Queen, he asked her if she would not give him some sign. Then he would surely succeed in fulfilling her desire. The beautiful Lady, in tones of deepest appreciation and gentleness, thanked her childlike emissary for his efforts. She then promised to give him the necessary sign saying:

“So be it, my son. Return here tomorrow in order that thou mayest secure for the Bishop the sign for which he has asked. When this is in thy possession, he will believe thee. He will no longer doubt thy word and suspect thy good faith. Be assured that I shall reward thee for all thou hast undergone. Go now, tomorrow I shall await thee here again.” And Our Lady sweetly added, “Do not forget me.”

At this point in the story we meet the third Juan, the uncle of Juan Diego, Juan Bernardino. He enters the narrative as a very sick man, lying in his bed in a fit of fever, for he had contracted that mortal disease the Indians called *cocolixtle*, which had claimed many thousands of lives that year. Quickly it came upon its victim and quickly it went, more often than not leaving death in its wake. So poor Juan Bernardino, who was in good health when his nephew last saw him, was now at death’s door. Seeing his dear uncle in this terrible condition, Juan was beside himself with grief, for he was the only consolation Juan had on this earth after his wife’s decease. Quickly he called in the native doctors to see if they could break the fever, but it was of no avail; in fact, they were only making him worse. All that night and all the next day, he sat compassionately by his uncle’s bedside, offering him whatever alleviation he could. Surely, Juan thought, the Holy Virgin would understand why he was unable to keep his appointment that afternoon as he had promised.

Soon the sick man became aware that he was not going to recover and, informing his nephew that his time to quit this world was fast approaching, he asked him to leave in the morning for Tlatelolco and bring back a priest “with the healing hands” that he might confess and be anointed.

Very early, before sunrise, Juan Diego hustled off on his way to find a priest. It was now Tuesday, the twelfth of December. As he drew near the hill where he had spoken to Our Lady, he was faced with a dilemma; surely he would find her waiting for him if he took the usual path, and he could not afford to be detained at this time. He had not a moment to lose, or his uncle might die without a priest. So he decided to skirt the hill on its opposite side, a much rougher course, in his hopes of avoiding a confrontation. He thought to slip unseen by the eyes of her who sees all (alas, how many times have we not made the same mistake); but, as he passed by the prominence, he could scarcely believe what his eyes beheld; for up ahead of him he saw the Holy Virgin in a blaze of light, gliding effortlessly down the slope on an angle so as to intercept him.

“My dear little one,” she called to him, “where are you going? What road is this you are taking?”

Juan was overcome with shame. As one commentator noted, “He had failed her; she had not failed him. Since he had not sought her on the heights, she sought him in the depths.” Has she not done the same for us? Utterly confused, and at a loss for an explanation, he spontaneously resorted to pleasantries, “My daughter, my dear little one; God keep you, Lady! Did you sleep well? And how is your health?”

Nothing so beautifully brings out the simplicity of Juan Diego as this amusing parlance. He talked to Mary as he would have to his own daughter, and most assuredly it wrung from her childlike heart a humoring smile. Perhaps it called to her mind the like tender questions she had heard on earth from her own dear father, St. Joachim. Then, quickly regaining his presence of mind, Juan spoke more soberly about his uncle’s sickness and his intention of going to get a priest.

When he finished speaking there was a pause. He looked up to see the lovely Woman smiling most affectionately upon him. With supreme gentleness and compassion she replied—and these words should reverberate from the walls of every church, home, and school in Christendom:

“Listen, and let it penetrate your heart, my dear little son; do not be troubled or weighted 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? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?”

She again paused, gazed sympathetically upon him, and continued. “Do not let this illness of your uncle worry you, because he is not going to die of his sickness. At this very moment he is cured.”

Never before had Our Lady so openly revealed the tenderness of her Immaculate Heart. This revelation marked the beginning of the Age of Mary. What saint or mystic was ever so privileged as was this humble Mexican Indian to hear such words, "Am I not here who am your Mother?"

Yes, O Mary, it is true. What you said to Juan Diego was meant for the whole world. There is no one, no matter how destitute of grace, who is not within reach of your maternal embrace if he will but approach you with a resolve to sin no more. You are the Mother of all who want to be your children. But to be your child, a true child of so holy a Mother, a Mother so blessed by God, is no vague platitude; it can actually be achieved. How? Through the Blessed Eucharist, by which we become one with her Son. It is the Flesh she gave Jesus that makes us one with Jesus and children of His Mother.

Our Lady would not call anyone at random her child, as one author mistakenly puts it, "regardless of race, color, or creed." The first two "regardlesses" are certainly no obstacle to divine union, since they owe their origin to the divine Will, and the third "regardless" may be all right among Masonic, anti Revelationist circles, but it is downright heretical to make it a "regardless" when it refers to becoming a child of Mary. No one can benefit unto salvation from the infinite intercessory power of Mary, which she has as God's Mother, unless he professes the true Faith as taught by the Roman Catholic Church. And if anyone is ashamed to call himself Roman Catholic, Our Lady will be ashamed of such a one when he appears before her Son for judgment.

As we meditate these words addressed to us through Juan Diego, let us have tremendous confidence in Mary. Remember she has a heart-though Immaculate, none, the less human-that burns to save souls, bleeds over our transgressions, and compassionates our sufferings. She knows what it is to suffer because she suffered; she suffered deeply, and yet she suffered silently. And, like her Divine Son, she suffers in and with her children, the Church, the Mystical Body. When a child of Mary suffers so does the Mother, not physically-for her body is glorified-but spiritually. As it is in the nature of a mother to desire to put herself in the place of a suffering child and to grieve even more than the one afflicted; so it is the nature of Our Mother Mary to feel this same compassion-though more intensely-for all her spiritual children, regardless of race and color.

Mary tenderly loves all men of good will. And she especially loved her newly converted Indians. She loved their "littleness," their humility. She had compassion for their unjust afflictions. And she was delighted in the way her bronze-skinned children lovingly inhaled the whole spirit, as well as the doctrine, of the gospel. Were it not so astoundingly true we might sound somewhat blasphemous in asserting it: O Mary, one would have to be insane not to love you, because for our eternal good, in the person of Juan Diego, you have irresistibly *forced yourself upon us*.

After these soothing words of encouragement, Our Lady ordered Juan to climb up the hill, and there at the top he would find the sign the Bishop needed. "Go, my son, to the summit of the hill . . . There you will find a large variety of flowers. Gather them carefully and assemble them. Then, bring them here."

Not stopping to ask how this could be-for it was well into winter and all the foliage had died-the unpretentious ambassador, trusting completely in his Lady's word, hurried up the slope. And lo and behold! over the crest, he saw a brilliantly panoply of the most exquisite flowers, including Castilian roses, blossoming in the frozen soil. Juan was struck with amazement. Now the Bishop would surely believe him! Then, as he had been directed, he carefully gathered as many of them as he could fit into his outstretched tilma and brought them down to show to his Queen. She then took the flowers and with her own hands rearranged them, as only a woman can, saying as she did so, "My little son, these varied flowers are the sign which you are to take to the Bishop. Tell him in my name that in them he will recognize my will and that he must fulfill it." Hereupon she sent her emissary on his way, but first cautioned him not to allow anyone to see what he carried until he was before the Bishop.

Taking his leave of the glorious Woman, he joyfully trod down the road to the city. As he bounced along with a confident gait he was careful to wrap the ends of his tilma around the flowers, gently pressing them to his chest so that he would not lose a single one. Arriving at the palace with his precious burden, Juan politely asked once again to see the Bishop. This time the servants angrily rushed out at him, threatening to drive him away, but Juan wouldn't budge. Courageously he stood his ground. They, in turn, heaped all kinds of insults upon him, and passing back through the metal gate they clanged it shut in his face. There was no way, they told him, that he was going to see the Bishop. Juan pleaded that this time the Bishop would have to believe him: They had to let him in. But they laughed him to scorn.

Humiliations were nothing new to Juan Diego; however, like anybody else, he felt them keenly; but he wasn't going to leave until he got an audience and that was final! So, installing himself next to the gate, he purposely began to make himself utterly obnoxious to the porters by continually pleading for admittance. Like the man in Our Lord's parable, who by a simple request wasn't able to get his friend to rise out of bed to lend him some loaves to refresh some unexpected guests; but who forced his friend to rise and help him because "of his importunity," so too did this patient messenger hope to wear down the resistance of these "who goes there" bullies by his persistent "importunity." This is the spirit God desires to see in us. He wants us to be persistent even with Him. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Finally, one of the court officials noticed that the Indian was concealing something underneath his cloak.

He approached and asked what it was. Juan bit his tongue and kept silent. At this the man got very angry, threatening to use force to find out, and Juan, drawing back, was compelled to let some of the attendants get a glimpse of the flowers. They could hardly believe what they saw. One of them tried to snatch one or two, but as he reached for them, the blossoms seemed to melt into the fabric. There was something unusual happening here! Someone rushed to the Bishop's quarters to report the phenomenon. Zumarraga (this was the first time he had been informed of Juan's arrival), hearing about the flowers, wondered exceedingly, and ordered the Indian to be brought in at once. With the prelate, at this time, was the new Governor of Mexico, Bishop Fuenleal, who had replaced the tyrant Don Nune de Guzman. Finding himself standing before such illustrious personages, Juan felt all the more nervous, but assuming a confident bearing that seemed to be a special charisma for this momentous occasion, he bowed reverentially, not kneeling, lest he lose his hold of the tilma.

Then he recounted before his amazed listeners the entire story of what had transpired at Tepeyac: how the Lady had promised a sign; how she directed him to climb the hill, where he would find "many flowers growing"; how he had gathered them in his tilma; and how she had rearranged them with her own hand, telling him to take them to the Bishop that he might at last believe her message and fulfill her desire. Listening with rapt attention to every word his excited guest had to say, Fra Zumarraga, chin in hand, was the picture of perplexity. Having finished the story, Juan took a deep breath and, reaffirming his grip on the corners of the tilma as he clutched it for the last time to his bosom, his voice rallied, "Your Excellency, here is the sign you asked for." And, opening his hands, the tilma fell, and from it a celestial bouquet of multi-colored blooms, mingled with Castilian roses, cascaded softly to the floor before the startled dignitaries, and perfumed the room with a heavenly aroma.

Zumarraga jumped to his feet and stared at the roses, momentarily speechless; his prayer for peace had been answered! Then, as he lifted his eyes from the prodigy on the floor, there suddenly appeared on the Indian's tilma an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary in resplendent glory. The wooden floor resounded with the thump of bended knees as both dignitaries knelt in adoration, caught in a timeless moment, with wide eyes riveted on the tilma as if contemplating an apparition. Juan felt uneasy as he perceived that their gaze was no longer on the flowers but upon him, and looking down upon his garment he saw the object of their veneration. *It was she, the Holy Mother of the True God, just as he had seen her on the hill!*

For a long time no words were spoken. When one beholds a miracle it is irreverent to speak; one cannot but keep silence, gaze, and adore. Our Lady will not be outdone in generosity. She always gives over and above what she is asked. The Good Thief from his bed of wood asked her crucified Son for a remembrance and received Paradise; the good Bishop from his oratory asked for roses from Castile and received the Mystical Rose from Heaven.

After some moments lost in eternity Zumarraga, rising from the floor, embraced Juan Diego and begged his forgiveness for not believing him sooner. Then, reverently untying the precious relic from the bearer's neck, he carried it to his private chapel where he could venerate it alone. Of course, no news travels like religious news, and so it didn't take long before word of the miracle spread throughout the city. Soon crowds of the anxious faithful converged upon the episcopal residence, piously demanding to see the Image. All that day and overnight Juan remained at the Bishop's house as his most honored guest; but, when morning came, he was desirous to return to his uncle to assist him in his recovery. Before setting out for his home, he conducted the Bishop to Tepeyac Hill and pointed out the exact spot where the Mother of God wanted her church to be built. Then, accompanied by a host of attendants from the palace and with his own personal guard of honor, he returned to his uncle. The pilgrim would never travel alone anymore.

Surely, it must have been quite a sight for the Indians to see little Juan Diego, who shortly before was kicked about like an old shoe, now being triumphantly escorted around the countryside like a national hero. Arriving in Tolpetlac, the humble celebrity was overjoyed to see his uncle recuperating on the porch of his cabin taking in the fresh air. And when he asked his nephew the reason for all this retinue, Juan told him the story from the beginning. Different theories are offered to explain why Juan never told his uncle about the first apparition, but the most likely reason is that he did not want to expose himself to ridicule in the eyes of his own people until he could prove the veracity of the vision. Juan Bernardino nodded as if he already knew what had happened, and patiently suppressed his own sequential epilogue until his nephew told him about the heavenly Woman's pledge of his cure. He then interrupted his nephew to ask the exact time these words were uttered. And to their great joy and astonishment, the uncle related to the assembled visitors that it was at that very hour, when perceiving himself to be at the last extremity of life, that a dazzling light had flooded his quiet chamber, and the same beautiful Lady appeared to him all radiant with that glory his nephew described. Immediately, he felt a profound peace come over his soul, and through his limbs a healing wave seemed to roll, filling him with strength and cooling his burning fever. Aware that he was cured, he climbed out of bed, fell to his knees before the celestial physician, and listened as she sweetly told him what she had done for his nephew. Then she revealed to him the title by which she wished to be known and invoked by the Mexican people: "I am," the Lady solemnly said, "the ever-Virgin, Holy Mary of Guadalupe!"

Nothing has caused more confusion to Guadalupan scholars than the word itself, Guadalupe. Why would Our Lady in visiting the Indians ask them to invoke her by a title that meant something only to Spaniards? Guadalupe was the name of a famous Marian shrine in Estremadura in eastern Spain. One may with every pious intention say, "What difference does it make? Our Lady said it, I believe it, and that's final!" But this is a case where a scholarly examination would enkindle devotion rather than detract from it.

In analyzing the title Guadalupe one must keep in mind the ardent prayer of Fra Zumarraga which merited so dramatic an answer. The holy man prayed for peace, peace between two peoples, Spaniard and Indian. This enigmatic title of the Virgin of Tepeyac would prove to be a symbolic catalyst for procuring this peace.

The question arises, and justly so, did Our Lady actually say Guadalupe when she spoke to Juan Bernardino? Or did she say something that sounded like it? It seems that in the Nahuatl or Aztec tongue they had no equivalent sound for the Latin G or D. The interpreter standing by Juan Bernardino's pallet translated the title as he thought Our Lady meant it, namely Guadalupe. But Our Lady couldn't have said exactly that, unless by a special charisma the cured man was enabled to pronounce a G and D. What the Mother of God actually said, and what she wanted to be thought to have said as she looked prophetically into the centuries ahead, are two different things. In the Nahuatl language the expression "she who crushes the serpent" sounds very much like Guadalupe. Rendered phonetically, the Aztec word would be Coatloxopeuh.

Surely, it was only natural for the Spanish interpreter to assume that Our Lady really wanted to be known under her revered title of Guadalupe that was so familiar to every Spaniard, and he thought that, had the Indian been able to pronounce all the consonants involved, this is what he would have said. So, according to the mind of the interpreter, Juan Bernardino tried as best he could to say Guadalupe. But since it was to the Indians that the Virgin appeared, and not to the Spanish, the more likely explanation is that she did not say Guadalupe at all, but rather Coatloxopeuh. This sounds very much like the Spanish word, and to the Indians it meant that the Virgin of Tepeyac was the one who "crushes the serpent." The reasons for this interpretation are extremely convincing.

Remember that Our Lady had appeared to Juan Diego on the very spot where the devil, the infernal serpent, had inspired the false worship of the snake bedecked mother goddess. And, too, the natives had long worshipped Quetzalcoatl, the Stone Serpent, as a deity, indeed the mightiest of all their gods. Was it not fitting then that the Queen of Heaven, who so ardently desired to save these poor souls, should identify herself in the role that God ordained for her in Genesis 3:15 as the Woman who would one day "crush the serpent's head"? The symbolism is overwhelmingly clear.

But how is it that the word Guadalupe was an answer to the good Bishop's prayer for peace? Here is a title chosen by Our Lady, the Seat of Wisdom, that could be cherished by both Indian and Spaniard alike. The Indians understood it to mean in their tongue, which is the tongue Our Lady used, that the Virgin of Tepeyac was greater than their serpent god, Quetzalcoatl, and indeed his conqueror. To the Spaniards, in the title as it

has come down to us, Guadalupe was a reminder of their homeland and a pledge that, even here in this distant country of Mexico, the patronage of their heavenly Queen had followed them. Guadalupe, referring to their common Mother, would be a unifying bond between their nations. The word itself, with all it stands for, would not only bind the two peoples; it would fuse them forever into one people. No other title of Our Lady could have produced this effect. It was a veritable kiss of peace.

The First Enthronement

After Juan Diego had designated to Bishop Zumarraga the exact spot where the Woman wanted her church built, construction of a temporary edifice got underway immediately. In just two weeks' time a handsome little chapel of no unworthy architecture was completed. On the feast of St. Stephen, the day after Christmas, the sacred Image was carried in triumphal procession from the city to its new home. It was quite a sight. Never had Mexico seen such jubilee. . . . Overnight, mourning had turned into joy. With Juan Diego walking closest to Our Lady, in the place of honor; Juan Bernardino by his side; Fra Zumarraga right behind; and next to him his good friend the Conqueror himself, the Marquis Hernando Cortez, and the Marquessa his wife; and the whole population following in procession, they arrived at the chapel to enthrone the Image of Guadalupe amidst unprecedented exuberance.

The First Miracle

The Indians, especially, were swept away with an elation that knew no bounds. As they danced and sang, in their thousands, waving green sprays to and fro, their voices thundered all around the hills with audacious but holy pride as they chanted, "The Virgin is one of us. Our pure Mother, Our Sovereign Lady, is one of us!" What an answer to the inhumanity of slavery! How could one any longer enslave the son of a Queen before whom every king must bow?

In a transport of enthusiasm, one group of young warriors took their bows and celebrated by sending a pretty volley of arrows flying through the air. Unfortunately, they were not too careful where they aimed and one of the shafts struck a spectator, piercing his neck, and killing him instantly. The poor native was picked up by his sorrowing friends and carried into the chapel, where they placed him at the feet of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Here in the presence of her who had promised to be their consolation, they pathetically pleaded that she not allow such a solemnity to be marred by such a tragedy. Everyone together prayed for a miracle.

"Please," the Christian Indians prayed, "let our brothers who are still in the darkness of idolatry see the power of the holy Virgin of Tepeyac."

All of a sudden the dead man opened his eyes and rose up on his feet, fully recovered. Spaniards and Indians jumped for joy, spontaneously embracing one another with true brotherly affection. With the cure of this physical wound, the Mother of God, who is the Health of the Sick, began healing the wound of animosity that until then had kept these two races so bitterly divided. The Faith of the conquerors had united with the Fatherland of the conquered. The labor had indeed been most painful, but Mexico was born.

The Aftermath

At the Bishop's request, Juan Diego moved to a little apartment prepared for him adjacent to the chapel. He was to be Our Lady of Guadalupe's honor guard, the custodian of her house, and a sort of tour guide for the barrage of pilgrims that immediately descended upon Tepeyac Hill. The Indian who was killed during the inauguration ceremony and brought back to life by Our Lady's intercession remained at the shrine with Juan Diego. For the rest of his life the grateful native swept the chapel floor and did other menial jobs as a token of appreciation for what this holy Mother had done for him.

So from far and wide the natives came to see the miraculous Image. And Juan Diego became a preacher. He was one of their own, one they could trust, and, with his characteristic intensity, he told his people about the Virgin and about her Son who died for them. He did not have to traverse mountains and valleys to reach the unreachable as the good friars did; no, he just stood at his post and souls came to him, I should say they came to see their Mother, the most pure Lady. Like Caesar, they came, they saw; but unlike Caesar, they were conquered. Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego conquered them.

In fact, there was hardly a native who approached the priests for Baptism in those early years who had not first been evangelized by the custodian at the shrine. By 1541, just ten years after the apparitions, there were ten million Indians who had been converted from paganism. Before Our Lady's coming the missionaries were able to pour the saving waters upon the heads of only one million natives, and most of these were orphaned children, victims of war, whom the loving padres had adopted and educated. Such a mass conversion was an unprecedented phenomenon, the likes of which had never been witnessed in any country of the world. Fr. Toribio in his *Indian History* relates: "Had I not witnessed it with my own eyes, I should not venture to report it. I have to affirm that another priest and myself baptized in five days fourteen thousand two hundred and odd souls." And just to say that the Indians sought Baptism is an understatement; they literally came in tears, begging the padres for it. For the same author elsewhere tells of different incidents where the friars, upon entering a village, would be accosted by entire families pleading in tears to be made Christians, while making frantic gestures for the water to be poured on their head.

But Our Lady in her Image does not sit back and wait for souls to approach. She proceeds to meet them on the way. This can be seen by her posture on the tilma. Her left knee is bent and her right foot stands a little forward, indicating that she is coming ... always coming, to help her children. And she is approaching not alone, but "with Child," for she wears a tasseled waistband indicating her condition. She is bringing Jesus, her divine Son, to her people, just as she brought Him to her cousin St. Elizabeth. And with Elizabeth can we not cry out, "O America, whence is this to thee that the Mother of thy Lord should come to thee!"

Abandoned by her European children, who walked out of the True Church to the number of five million to follow after the errors of Luther, the Immaculate Mother of God came to the New World. To the highways and byways of Mexico she came, to invite a new people to fill up the vacant seats at her Son's wedding banquet. And Mexico responded with joy.

One of the earliest fruits of this response was the courageous Mexican martyr, St. Philip of Jesus, who shed his blood for Christ as a missionary in Japan in 1597. Who would have thought that in just fifty years, long before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock-in fact, "while the Mayflower wood was still in the green"-that a South American Indian, educated at a flourishing Mexican University, could be found halfway around the world evangelizing the Japanese? Another heroic exemplar of the fruit of Guadalupe was our own modern-day confessor and martyr Fr. Miguel Agustin Pro.

The Crowning

Throughout the past centuries it would seem as though the Mexicans could never be satisfied with what they had done to honor their Senora. Indeed it was that we haven't done enough attitude that prompted her devotees to solemnly crown their Immaculate Sovereign with a gorgeous diadem on October 12, 1895. The wealthier ladies of the nation vied with one another in holy competition to see who would contribute more precious jewels to adorn her crown. As expected, the anticlericals took advantage of the solemnity to criticize the church for such wasted extravagance, reechoing the never-fading complaint of Judas Iscariot, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?" But the fact is that the poor love to honor their Mother and to make sacrifices in her regard. In answer to such objections Fr. Lee, the most renowned Guadalupan author, adroitly concluded, "If her enemies murmur because her crown is of gold, her children will add to it one of diamonds."

So intense was the Guadalupan fever around the time of the coronation that for a little while even the secular newspapers condescended to write a few words in praise of their country's Patroness. One such article that appeared in the daily journal *Gil Blas* very beautifully summed up the mind of the nation: "All, whether believers or not, find something to love, and to love intensely, in the Virgin of Guadalupe. Against her in this land no man blasphemes. She is the ideal, the light that shines above our strife and our incredulity."

Yet, even as the glittering crown, on that momentous autumn day, was being lifted by the presiding archbishop above Our Lady's head, the violent forces of evil were at the same time secretly plotting her overthrow. Less than thirty years later, as the article on Padre Pro details, the bullet-ridden bodies of one hundred and sixty martyred priests, executed as enemies of the state, were a shockingly graphic result of that satanic conspiracy. Mysteriously, and for His own unfathomable reasons, that is the way it has always been with God Our Father.

Whom He loves, those He chastises. It is a fact of history that out of the blood of the martyrs the Church was born ... and from the blood of today's martyrs we hope the Church will be reborn to shine more glorious than ever.

Rome's Response

Over the years the Popes have responded with unparalleled enthusiasm to all the pious demands of the Mexican hierarchy to further the cause of their Benefactress. In all, fifteen Pontiffs have affixed their signatures to Guadalupan decrees. She has been canonized the Patroness of Mexico and of all Latin America. Pius XII extended her reign even further by declaring her Empress of all the Americas, North, South, and Central. Now, we North Americans are not getting in on something unfairly here, because actually at the time of Our Lady's visitation in 1531 there were as yet no national boundaries separating North from South.

We cannot pass by the Popes without mentioning the most devoted of all the Vicars of Christ to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Pope Benedict XIV. This enigmatic Pontiff, who refused even the Catholic Queen Mary of England a Mass in honor of the then controverted devotion to the Sacred Heart (1750's) proved incapable of applying his famed over-cautious rigorism to the Mother as he did to her Son. Toward the Mexican Virgin his heart became soft as wax. He did everything he could to honor her. He gave her a Mass, a place in the Divine Office, and the first of the above-mentioned titles. And he once told Fr. Lopez, the Mexican Jesuit who had introduced him to the miraculous Image, that, if his duties did not prevent him, he would make a pilgrimage to the New World shrine, and approach the Holy Virgin as the other poor pilgrims did, "barefoot and on his knees". In 1754, when none of his predecessors in the chair of Peter had as yet officially approved the apparition, that was a courageous and beautiful thing for a Pope to say.

However, the privilege was left to our present Holy Father John Paul II [1981] to be the first Pope to visit Guadalupe in person. That was in January, 1979. Though it is true that wherever he went in his world-wide tours he drew record-breaking crowds of welcomers, nowhere did he receive the overwhelming turnout that he did in Mexico. God alone knows where they came from or how they got there, but an estimated nine million people lined this poor country's thorough-fares to greet the Holy Father, waving their bandettas and shouting thunderously, "Long live the Pope! Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe! Long live Christ the King!" As the head of the Church drove by these immense multitudes in an open, nicely waxed pick-up truck (the government refused to grant him the standard limousine used for heads of state), he must have been greatly touched by their heartrending simplicity. This fire of Catholic loyalty is the kind of thing that has today's anti-clerical government in Mexico very much concerned. Despite all the efforts to weaken it, the Faith in our neighboring republic is surprisingly vibrant.

The Anti-apparitionists

"Where the Body is there will the eagles gather." Some Doctors of the Church have interpreted these words of Our Lord to mean that wherever the Faith is strong, there will you find the forces of hell working with more frantic fury to destroy it. Certainly, the enemies of Jesus Christ have been a very visible reality south of the Rio Grande. And in that land they know full well that in order to crush His Church they must first demoralize the people's confidence in Our Lady of Guadalupe. But as they have learned from experience, the more they attack her the more will her children rise up in her defense.

The most recurrent attempt at disparaging the Holy Virgin was to attack the authenticity of the Image itself. Their futility in this ridiculous endeavor is pointed out in the accompanying article on the Miraculous Image. However, the anti-apparitionists, as they are called by the loyal Guadalupanos, seem never to weary of falling flat on their faces after being floored by the return fire of their own scientific weaponry.

Having failed in their laboratories to shake Our Lady off her throne, less sophisticated enemies resorted to more violent measures. During the Calles persecution in the 1920's (which persecution by the way dared not close her shrine) the wretched conspirators attempted to blow her out of existence with a time bomb. The potent explosive, ticking away from its concealment in a flower vase right below the Image, went off on schedule during a high Mass on November 14, 1921. So severe was the explosion that it shattered all the stained-glass windows in the basilica and uplifted whole chunks of marble and masonry from the sanctuary. A

huge bronze crucifix that stood above the altar was twisted as though it were made out of putty. When the smoke lifted, the stunned congregation was amazed to see that no one was hurt, not even the celebrants at the altar. And expecting to see the miraculous Image severely damaged, they looked up to her and, lo and behold, there she was, totally unscathed by the blast, and not even a crack on the protective glass that shielded her!

The New Cathedral

But in 1976 a sad thing happened on Tepeyac Hill. In place of the magnificent three-hundred-year-old baroque basilica, which was once hailed as the Citadel of the New World, a pragmatically bland modern circular cathedral was built to house the sacred Image, at a cost of seventy million dollars. The decision for this project came not from the Church, but from President Eccheverria, who also had a hand in the revolutionary design.

Of course there had to be some reason for their madness ... The old basilica was sinking. Something obviously had to be done. But why that? Why build a church that looks more like an astrodome sports arena than a house of God? The answer should be as obvious as the tilt in the old temple. If you want to weaken the people's faith in the Virgin of Guadalupe, you must de-incarnationalize her home. That means you must resort to iconoclastic or image-breaking measures. By removing all that is truly beautiful, truly Incarnational, like statues, pictorial stained-glass windows, Stations of the Cross, communion rails, and ornate altars, you can help diminish the respect due to Him whose house you are vandalizing. This is what the reckless liberals have already done to so many of our churches. So have they also done to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In building that ugly new edifice her enemies have vandalized her home. They have made her a dwelling place barren and devoid of beauty, unworthy of such a Mother. This is the real reason behind their madness ... a hatred for everything that is traditionally Catholic!

What the authorities would like to do with the old temple is to hoist it up straight, reinforce its foundations, and then open it as a museum. (The seventy-million dollar astrodome across the piazza would make a much finer museum!) When and if the doors of the ancient church do open for that purpose, there are assuredly going to be some interesting reactions. There seems to be an omen in the air-as at the time of the conquest-of an impending confrontation. Rumor has it that Mexico's Queen is not happy in her new surroundings. Neither are her children. Though the "powers that be," ecclesiastical as well as civil, who approved of this construction, may have lost the sense of what is beautiful, the Mexican people have not. They feel that their Mother is captive in a strange land ... and they want her to come back home.

A Challenge For Our Time

Never has the warfare between the Woman and the infernal serpent been more ferocious than it is in our day. With satanically inspired evil flourishing all around us, one would have to be naive to think that the anti-Christ has not already made his perfidious entry into the world. One need but call to mind the frenzied attack in 1972 on Michaelangelo's Pieta by a madman crying, "I am the devil!" or the outrageous sacrilege perpetrated against Our Lady of Guadalupe herself that same year, when an American film director, who, having deceived the abbot of the shrine as to his true intention, was permitted to enter the basilica, after hours, with a cast of demonized actors and actresses, and right there in the sanctuary, they performed diabolical and pornographic rituals.

Witness the way all media of entertainment, especially movies, have been saturated with violence, immorality, and open blasphemy. And our children are not devil worshipers. Yet they eat at his deadly table. They wear his fashions. They speak his lingo. They sing his songs and dance his dances. Pope John XXIII was once shown a film of a performance of a gyrating Elvis Presley, and he commented that the man seemed to be possessed. But today we are not talking about the "teeny bopper" antics of the 50's. We are talking about sheer perversity in its most degrading forms being popularized by today's rock groups. Can you imagine what Pope John would have said about the Rolling Stones?

Far more depraved is the current attitude on abortion. It is now looked upon even by so-called Catholics as a point of view. As if it were no more important than smoking vs. non-smoking. In fact our society has become so perverted in its ethical outlook that we allow "officers" from the SPCA to carry guns in order to insure the safety of animals, while we fine and imprison unarmed protestors who are concerned not merely about the safety but

about the very lives of unborn human beings. Our shepherds should be using their influence night and day to stop this carnage, instead of smiling and shaking hands with people whom they know have pro-abortion tendencies.

Finally, look at the grim reality of Communist aggression. Who can remain blind to the brutality and cruelty by which this bloody movement has taken over country after country, especially in the past three decades. You don't have to look very far away anymore. They are right in our backyard. First, Cuba, then Nicaragua, and now El Salvador ... a little country named after the Savior. And if it is such a good system-an answer to the world's poverty, as its liberal proponents attest (who, by the way, never choose to live under it)-then why does it need border patrols and barbed-wired fences? Is it to prevent mass immigration by freedom-seeking foreigners?

No, the Communists will stop at nothing short of world domination. Neither will the ultra wealthy international bankers who financed the Russian and all other modern revolutions. It is up to us Americans to put a stop to their advance. And if we are going to do battle against such a mammoth satanic force, we must place the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on our banners. Only she can crush the head of the serpent. She promised at Fatima that in the end Russia would be converted and that her Immaculate Heart would triumph. But this in no way means that we are to become pacifists. Prayer is never a substitute for action, but an aid to it. Christian Europe's victory in 1571 over the invading Moslem armies in the decisive naval battle of Lepanto was attributed to the intercession of the Holy Rosary, and in a special sense to Our Lady of Guadalupe. For the great Admiral Doria placed his vessel under the protection of the Mexican Virgin. The point being made here is that the soldiers who had prayed the Rosary still had to fight in order to win the battle. Doria hung up Our Lady of Guadalupe's picture in his cabin and then *girded himself with a sword*.

Though the whole world loves Our Lady of Guadalupe (it has just recently been made known to me that she is revered even in China), she belongs in a special way to Mexico. And in a certain sense all of Central America belongs to Mexico. For this nation was the first-born of all her isthmian children. Pope John Paul II saw there a spark, a spark that could inflame all of Central America with those ideals of sanctity long gone. And it is their common love for the Virgin of Guadalupe that will ignite that flame.

Let the following words of Pope Pius XII be to all Americans a salutary admonition ... a prophetic counsel, if you will. It is the conclusion of a prayer he composed in 1945 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of her first crowning. In this same prayer the Supreme Pontiff declared the Virgin of Guadalupe the Empress of all the Americas. "For we are certain," he said, "that as long as you are recognized as Queen and Mother, Mexico and America will be safe."

<http://catholicism.org/brmichael-guadalupe.html>