

Story of Our Lady of Guadalupe by Dom Antione Marie, OSB

<https://www.michaeljournal.org/articles/roman-catholic-church/item/the-miraculous-image-of-our-lady-of-guadalupe>

In the sixteenth century, the Blessed Virgin, moved with pity for the Aztec people who, living in the darkness of idolatry, offered to their idols multitudes of human victims, deigned to take into her own hands the evangelization of these Indians of Central America who were also her children. One of the Aztec gods, originally considered the god of fertility, had transformed himself over time into a ferocious god. A symbol of the sun, this god was in continuous battle with the moon and the stars and was believed to need human blood to restore his strength; if he died, life would be extinguished. Ever new victims, to be offered to him in perpetual sacrifice, therefore seemed essential.

In 1519, the Spaniard Cortez disembarked in Mexico, leading 500 soldiers. He conquered the country for Spain, yet was not lacking in zeal for the evangelization of the Aztecs. In 1524 he obtained the arrival of twelve Franciscans to Mexico. These missionaries quickly integrated into the population. Their goodness contrasted with the harshness of the Aztec priests, as well as that of some conquistadors. They began to build churches. However, the Indians were reluctant to accept Baptism, primarily because it would require them to abandon polygamy.

Juan Diego and Maria Lucia, his wife were among the first to receive Baptism. After his wife's death in 1529, Juan Diego withdrew to Tepetlac, 14 km from Mexico City, to the home of his uncle, Juan Bernardino, who had become a Christian as well. On December 9, 1531, as was his custom every Saturday, he left very early in the morning to attend the Mass celebrated in honor of the Blessed Virgin, at the Franciscan fathers' church, close to Mexico City. He walked past Tepeyac Hill. Suddenly, he heard a gentle and resounding song that seemed to come from a great multitude of birds. Raising his eyes to the top of the hill, he saw a white and radiant cloud. He looked around him and wondered if he was dreaming. All of a sudden, the song stopped and a woman's voice, gentle and graceful, called him: "Juanito, Juan Dieguito!" He quickly climbed the hill and found himself in the presence of a very beautiful young woman whose garments shone like the sun.

Speaking to him in Nahuatl, his native language, she said to him, "**Juanito, my son, where are you going?**"—"Noble Lady, my Queen, I am going to the Mass in Mexico City to hear the divine things that the priest teaches us there."—"I want you to know for certain, my dear son, that I am the perfect and always Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God from Whom all life comes, the Lord of all things, Creator of Heaven and Earth. I greatly desire that a church be built in my honor, in which I will show my love, compassion, and protection. I am your Mother full of mercy and love for you and all those who love me, trust in me, and have recourse to me. I will hear their complaints and I will comfort their affliction and their sufferings. So that I might show all My love, go now to the bishop in Mexico City and tell him that I am sending you to make known to him the great desire I have to see a church dedicated to me built here."

Juan Diego went straight to the bishop. Bishop Zumárraga, a Franciscan, the first bishop of Mexico, was a pious man and full of zeal, who had a heart overflowing with kindness towards the Indians. He heard the poor man attentively, but fearing an illusion, did not put much faith in his story. Towards evening, Juan Diego started on his way home. At the top of Tepeyac Hill, he had the pleasant surprise of meeting the Apparition again. He told her about his mission, then added, "I beg you to entrust your message to someone more known and respected so that he will believe it. I am only a simple Indian whom you have sent as a messenger to an important person. Therefore, he didn't believe me, and I do not want to greatly disappoint you."—"My dearest son," replied the Lady, "**you must understand that there are many more noble men to whom I could have entrusted my message and yet, it is because of you that my plan will succeed. Return to the bishop tomorrow... Tell him that it is I myself, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, who am sending you.**"

On Sunday morning after the Mass, Juan Diego went to the bishop's house. The prelate asked him many questions, then asked for a tangible sign of the truth of the Apparition. When Juan Diego went home, the bishop had him discreetly followed by two servants. At Tepeyac Bridge, Juan Diego disappeared from their sight, and despite all their searches on the hill and in the surrounding area, they could not find him again. Furious, they declared to the bishop that Juan Diego was an impostor who must absolutely not be believed. During this time, Juan Diego told the beautiful Lady, who was waiting for him on the hill, about his most recent meeting with the bishop. "**Come back tomorrow morning to seek the sign he is asking for,**" replied the Apparition.

Returning home, the Indian found his uncle ill, and the next day, he had to stay at his bedside to take care of him. As the illness got worse, the uncle asked his nephew to go look for a priest. At dawn on Tuesday, December 12, Juan Diego started on the road to the city. Approaching Tepeyac Hill, he thought it best to make a detour so as not to meet the Lady. But suddenly, he perceived her coming to meet him. Embarrassed, he explained his situation and promised to come back when he had found a priest to administer last rites to his uncle. **“My dear little one,”** replied the Apparition, **“do not be distressed about your uncle’s illness, because he will not die from it. I assure you that he will get well... Go to the top of the hill, pick the flowers that you will see there, and bring them to me.”** When he had arrived at the top of the hill, the Indian was stunned to find a great number of flowers in bloom, Castillian roses that gave off a very sweet fragrance. Indeed, in the winter, the cold allows nothing to survive, and besides, the place was too dry for flowers to grow there. Juan Diego gathered the roses, enfolded them in his cloak, or tilma, then went back down the hill. **“My dear son,”** said the Lady, **“these flowers are the sign that you are to give the bishop... This will get him to build the church that I have asked of him.”**

Juan Diego ran to the bishop. When he arrived, the servants made him wait for hours. Amazed at his patience, and intrigued by what he was carrying in his tilma, they finally informed the bishop, who, although with several people, had him shown in immediately. The Indian related his adventure, unfolded his tilma, and let the flowers, which were still shining with dew, scatter to the floor. With tears in his eyes, Bishop Zumárraga fell to his knees, admiring the roses from his native country.

All of a sudden, he perceived, on the tilma, the portrait of Our Lady. Mary’s image was there, as though printed on the cloak, very beautiful and full of gentleness. The bishop’s doubts gave way to a sure faith and a hope filled with wonder. He took the tilma and the roses, and placed them respectfully in his private oratory. The next day he went with Juan Diego to the hill where the apparitions had taken place. After having examined the sites, he let the seer return to his uncle’s house. Juan Bernardino had been completely cured. His cure had taken place at the very hour when Our Lady appeared to his nephew. He told him, “I have also seen her. She even came here and talked to me. She wants a church to be built on Tepeyac Hill and wants her portrait to be called ‘Saint Mary of Guadalupe.’ But she didn’t explain to me why.” The name “Guadalupe” is well known by the Spanish, because in their country there is a very old sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The news of the miracle spread quickly. In a short time, Juan Diego became well-known. **“I will spread your fame,”** Mary had told him, but the Indian remained as humble as ever. To make it easier to meditate on the Image, Bishop Zumárraga had the tilma transported to his cathedral. Then work was begun on the construction of a small church and a hermitage for Juan Diego on the hill of apparitions. The next December 25, the bishop consecrated his cathedral to the Most Blessed Virgin, to thank her for the remarkable favors with which she had blessed his diocese. Then, in a magnificent procession, the miraculous image was carried to the sanctuary that had just been completed on Tepeyac Hill.

When the Indians had learned the news of Our Lady’s apparitions, an enthusiasm and joy such as had never been seen before spread among them. Renouncing their idols, superstitions, human sacrifices, and polygamy, many asked to be baptized. Nine years after the apparitions, nine million Indians had converted to the Christian faith—nearly 3,000 a day! The details of the Image of Mary moved the Indians deeply—this woman is greater than the sun-god since she appears standing before the sun. She surpasses the moon god since she keeps the moon under her feet. She is no longer of this world since she is surrounded by clouds and is held above the world by an angel. Her folded hands show her in prayer, which means that there is Someone greater than she...

Even in our time, the mystery of this miraculous image remains. The tilma, a large apron woven by hand from cactus fibers, bears the holy image, which is 1.43 meters tall. The Virgin’s face is perfectly oval and is a gray color verging on pink. Her eyes have a profound expression of purity and gentleness. The mouth seems to smile. The very beautiful face, similar to that of a mestizo Indian, is framed by a black head of hair that, up close, is comprised of silky locks. She is clad in a full tunic, of a pinkish red hue that no one has ever been able to reproduce, and that goes to her feet. Her bluish-green mantle is edged with gold braid and studded with stars. A sun of various shades forms a magnificent background, with golden rays shining out.