

Our Lady of Guadalupe: Truly heaven-sent

Veneration of [Our Lady of Guadalupe](#), whose feast day is Dec. 12, is not limited to Catholics of Hispanic heritage. Indeed, she is the patroness of all America – North, Central and South – as Pope Pius XII designated in 1945.

How did this come about?

In the Western Hemisphere, the greatest and most potent image attributed to heavenly intervention is that of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

It appeared in 1531 on the cactus-fiber cloak, or tilma, of a native Mexican who had been baptized and given the name Juan Diego. His conversion had been sincere, and he was on his way to Mass one cold December morning when Our Lady appeared to him on a hill called Tepeyac and spoke to him in his native tongue. She ordered him to tell Bishop Juan Zumarraga of Mexico City to build a church there in her honor. When he finally gained an audience with Bishop Zumarraga, the good bishop hesitated, not knowing whether to believe the native's astonishing story. He asked Juan Diego to have the lady give him a sign in order to assist him in his decision.

On his return home, Juan Diego again encountered the Virgin, who bid him to return to the bishop with the same message the next day. She would provide him with a sign. Upon returning to his village, however, Juan learned that his beloved uncle was near death and urgently bid him to find a priest to assist him in his final hours. Now burdened with two urgent requests, Juan Diego opted to first aid his uncle by finding a priest.

He purposefully took another route around Tepeyac in order to avoid the Virgin. But she intercepted him, assuring him that his uncle would be cured. She ordered him to climb the barren

hill and gather the roses he would find on its summit and take them to the bishop who had requested a sign. Juan Diego did so and before departing on his journey the Virgin herself arranged the miraculous blooms in the folds of his cloak. This time Juan Diego encountered even more difficulty in gaining admittance to the bishop, but he persisted, and when he was finally ushered in and opened up his tilma to the cascade of unseasonable flowers he was surprised to watch the prelate fall to his knees.

The roses alone were not what had astonished the bishop. Juan Diego soon discovered that Our Lady had provided an even more marvelous sign. It was a portrait of her as he had seen her, an image that has become the most powerful and beloved likeness of the Virgin in all of human history.

She had dark skin and hair like the native peoples who were soon attracted to her image and persuaded by what they saw. Though she would seem to be a goddess, wearing a cloak of stars and blocking the sun's rays while standing on the moon held aloft by an attendant angel, her head was bowed in humility. Something greater was coming through her. Beneath her folded hands a maternity sash was tied. She was pregnant. A new beginning was about to unfold.

A shrine was immediately built on Tepeyac where Juan Diego spent the rest of his days as caretaker and guardian of the indelible portrait. The power of that image soon became evident. In the next decade between 8 million and 10 million natives were converted to the faith. Not since apostolic times had so many conversions taken place. The vast number more than made up for the losses suffered in a Europe that was now divided by the Reformation.

Prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe

O Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother of the Americas, grant to our homes the grace of loving and respecting life in its

beginnings, with the same love with which you conceived in your womb the life of the Son of God. Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Fair love, protect our families so that they may always be united and bless the upbringing of our children.

Our hope, look upon us with pity, teach us to go continually to Jesus, and if we fall help us to rise again and return to him through the confession of our faults and our sins in the sacrament of penance, which gives peace to the soul.

We beg you to grant us a great love of all the holy sacraments, which are, as it were, the signs that your Son left us on earth. Thus, Most Holy Mother, with the peace of God in our consciences, with our hearts free from evil and hatred, we will be able to bring to all others true joy and true peace, which come to us from your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Amen. (By Pope John Paul II)