



Bishop Hicks' Column

December 2021

Our Lady of Guadalupe



The Virgin Mary is known by many titles in the Catholic Church. They represent her universal love and compassion to all her children. One of her beautiful and powerful titles is Our Lady of Guadalupe. Some may assume that because of this title, her appeal is limited to only Mexicans, since she appeared to St. Juan Diego at the hill of Tepeyac in Mexico in December of 1531.

However, since her apparitions, she has converted millions of people worldwide to her son, Jesus. For this reason, St. John Paul II proclaimed that she is not only the queen of Mexico, but formally declared her as the patroness of the Americas. In other words, as Pope Francis said, "She shares all the joys and hopes, the sorrows and troubles of God's People, which is made up of men and women of every race and nation."

As we are quickly approaching the quincentennial year of her appearances, her message continues to be more relevant than ever for all people. In a world filled with division, violence, murder, atheism, spiritual apathy and distrust, Our Lady of Guadalupe urgently desires us to know and love her son, Jesus. For it is through Jesus that we find true unity, peace and salvation.

As a priest, I led many trips of parishioners to visit a home for orphaned and abandoned children in Morelos, Mexico. As we toured the dormitories and classrooms, most would notice that there was a picture, candle or statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe in almost every room. I would share with the group that Guadalupe had a special place in the hearts of these children because they looked to her not only as the Mother of God, but also as their own mother. They took real comfort in knowing that even though they were no longer with their biological parents, she is their mother. Her presence beautifully reminds them that they are not alone or forgotten; instead, they are loved. She shares with them and us the same powerful words that she shared with St. Juan Diego, "Do not be afraid, am I not here, your Mother?"

As an added bonus to the trip to the orphanage, we would also spend a day in pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. On most of our visits, we would begin by exiting the bus and making a human chain, holding each other's hands so that we would not get separated in the vast crowds. My group would always be impressed with the level of faith and devotion they witnessed as many people approached their penitential journey to Our Lady on their knees and in deep prayer. Once inside the basilica, we would celebrate Mass and pray the rosary together in one of the many side chapels. No one ever had a doubt that we were on holy ground.

After Mass and the purchase of some religious souvenirs and gifts, it would be time to conclude our visit by walking behind the main altar and view up close the tilma of St. Juan Diego. It is the actual cloth that bears Our Lady of Guadalupe's beautiful image. On one of the visits, as we were walking back to our bus, one parishioner asked me, "Does the real tilma from 1531 still exist?" I replied, "Yes! We just looked at it behind the altar!" With shock and surprise, she raised her voice and exclaimed, "THAT was the real tilma? It's not a copy?" I assured her that it was the original, one and only, tilma. With that, she said, "I have to go back and see her again." Without hesitation, the whole group agreed to turn around and get another glimpse of the tilma bearing the image of the patroness of the Americas, Our Lady of Guadalupe.

When we realize and are convinced that Mary our mother is real, and she truly wants us to know and love her son, then our hearts, on fire, are naturally drawn to her. We feel a deep longing to see her, to talk with her and to celebrate her.

This year, as we return to this special feast day on Dec. 12, may Our Lady of Guadalupe continue to draw all her children close to her and to follow the Gospel of life and light of her son, Jesus. Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, pray for us.