

*Message of*  
*Guadalupe*



CTS CHRISTIAN SHRINES SERIES

## **Catholic Truth Society Publications** **Distributed by Ignatius Press**

Catholic Truth Society and Ignatius Press have joined forces to make CTS's outstanding booklets available in North America. CTS booklets explain the faith, teaching, and life of the Catholic Church. They are based on Sacred Scripture, the Second Vatican Council documents, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. These booklets provide authentic Catholic teaching; they address issues of life and truth which are relevant to all. They aim to inform and educate readers on the many issues that people have to deal with today.

[www.ignatius-cts.com](http://www.ignatius-cts.com)

*All rights reserved. Copyright © 2000, The Incorporated Catholic Truth Society of London. Distributed in North America by Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA.*

*ISBN 978 1 86082 098 4*

Front cover image: *The Virgin of Guadalupe* by Miguel Cabrera © Christie's Images/CORBIS, *Crowd during Mexican Pilgrimage* © Danny Lehman/CORBIS.

# MESSAGE OF GUADALUPE

by  
Gillian Rae

*All booklets are published thanks to the  
generous support of the members of the  
Catholic Truth Society*



CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY  
PUBLISHERS TO THE HOLY SEE

## CONTENTS

<b>The Queen of Mexico .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Aztecs and Conquistadors .....	4
Cortes in Mexico .....	6
Rebellion .....	8
Men of War and Men of God .....	10
Missionaries in Mexico .....	11
<b>Our Lady and St Juan Diego .....</b>	<b>15</b>
The Second Apparition .....	17
The Third Apparition .....	18
The Fourth Apparition .....	19
The Church is Built .....	21
The Immaculate Conception .....	23
Our Lady and the Mexican Identity .....	24
Church and State in New Spain .....	26
The Fight for Mexican Independence .....	28
<b>The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Pope John Paul II in Mexico .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe .....	36
<b>The Image on the Tilma .....</b>	<b>39</b>
The Symbolism of the Image .....	41
<b>The Message of Our Lady to Mexico and to     the World .....</b>	<b>44</b>
Life Force .....	47
<b>Prayer of Pope John II .....</b>	<b>50</b>

---

---

## THE QUEEN OF MEXICO

Mexico has more public holidays than any other country in the world, but with the possible exceptions of Christmas and Easter, none is celebrated with more fervour than the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

On 12th December each year, thousands of people gather in or in front of the beautiful basilica in a suburb of Mexico City which is dedicated to the patroness of Mexico. Masses are said, there are processions and displays, and rich and poor alike cross the vast concourse on their knees to seek the blessing of the Virgin.

On this day, all over Mexico, even in the smallest villages, Mexicans honour Our Lady of Guadalupe.

They know her by many names: the Queen of Mexico; 'la Indita', the little Indian lady; 'la Morena de Tepeyac', the dark lady of Tepeyac; or even the familiar 'la Lupita', which, roughly translated, means the little Guadalupe.

Indeed, the deeply Catholic Mexicans are very familiar with their Queen. She is an essential part of the Mexican identity, and her image is everywhere - on the walls of homes and offices, in cars, buses and taxis, roadside shrines, and, of course, on the medals to be found round the necks of young and old.

It is the image of the Blessed Virgin as she appeared at Tepeyac in 1531, with dark skin, Indian features, small,

delicate hands clasped in prayer, and sad eyes. Sad, perhaps because the Mexico she came to help was at that time a very troubled country.

### **Aztecs and Conquistadors**

There are many Indian tribes in Mexico - Maya, Toltecs and Zapotecs to name a few.

In the 13th century the Aztec tribe began slowly but surely to conquer the others. By the time the Emperor Montezuma II came to power in 1502, the Aztecs were rulers of a huge empire. But it was still not large enough for Montezuma. From his magnificent capital of Tenochtitlan, later to become Mexico City, he sent his soldiers to conquer the lands of the Mixtec region.

The Aztecs were a proud but cruel people, and they treated those they conquered very harshly, often using them as slaves.

Their religion was a cruel one, too. They worshipped many gods, and made human sacrifices, especially to the god Huitzilopochtli. The tribes of the Mixtec region inflicted two terrible defeats on Montezuma's troops, which led to an increase in sacrifices to appease the 'angry' gods.

It was around this time that Aztec astrologers began to predict that the god Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent, would shortly appear to put an end to the dreadful bloodshed of war and sacrifices.

Shortly afterwards, in April 1519, the Spaniard Hernan Cortes and his 900 Conquistadors landed on the shores of Mexico. For the Aztec there could be no doubt that Cortes was the incarnation of the Plumed Serpent, and must be appeased.

But Cortes had not come to end the bloodshed. It was to continue for many years to come.

Hernan Cortes was born in the poverty-stricken region of the Estremadura in Spain in 1485. At the age of 19 he left his family to join the army and seek his fortune.

Under the command of Diego Velazquez, he took part in the Spanish invasion of Cuba. It was a brutal struggle which lasted three years, from 1511 to 1514, and cost many lives. Velazquez became governor of Cuba and made Cortes one of his most trusted lieutenants.

The King of Spain at the time, Carlos I, was also King of Sicily, Prince of Flanders and Germanic Emperor. As such he was the ruler of a considerable part of Europe. He was constantly at war, with rebellious subjects, rulers of other lands he wished to conquer, and also with the forces of the Ottoman Empire.

Warfare was very costly and Carlos realised that the legendary riches of the New World could provide him with the means of replenishing his coffers.

He began in the West Indies, then turned his attention to Mexico. On Velazquez's recommendation, Hernan Cortes was chosen to lead the Spanish conquest of

Mexico. Velazquez changed his mind at the last minute, but Cortes was determined to go, and set out sooner than had been planned before Velazquez could detain him.

It must be said that Cortes was bent on conquering Mexico, not so much for God, Spain and the King, but for his own glory and personal enrichment.

### **Cortes in Mexico**

He left Cuba in February 1519, with around nine hundred men, most of them, like himself, from the Estremadura region, 20 horses, and 11 cannon. Two months later, the ships which carried them landed on the Tabasco Coast. They were attacked by the Maya living there, but repulsed them and advanced into the Veracruz region.

A local chieftain, wishing to ingratiate himself with Cortes, offered him the 'gift' of a slave girl. Her name was Malintzin, but the Spanish dubbed her Dona Marina, and she became popularly known as la Malinche. A very intelligent woman, she quickly became indispensable to Cortes. She mastered the Spanish language rapidly and acted as interpreter in the Spaniards' dealings with the natives. To this day her memory is despised by Mexicans, who consider her to have betrayed her race and her country by collaborating so closely with the invaders. The word 'malinchista' is used to denote a traitor.

The Conquistadors were met by ambassadors sent by the Emperor Montezuma. Convinced that Cortes was the

incarnation of the god Quetzalcoatl, Montezuma had given instructions that the Spaniards be fêted and showered with gifts. Cortes and his troops were most gratified, but instead of pacifying them, as was the intention, the displays of wealth with which they were confronted only served to increase their greed.

If Cortes was able to conquer Mexico with so few men and weapons, it was only because so many of the non-Aztec tribes allied themselves to the Spanish invaders, hoping to throw off the burden of Aztec domination under which they had laboured for so long. It was with the help of the Totomacs and the Tlaxcaltans that the Conquistadors were able to reach the capital, Tenochtitlan.

Montezuma received them warmly, still under the illusion that Cortes was the god Quetzalcoatl. The Spanish thought they might be able to subdue the people with little difficulty, but they had to make sure they knew that the Spanish were now in control rather than Montezuma. They decided the best course was to take the Emperor prisoner.

At the beginning of the year 1520, Cortes was obliged to leave Tenochtitlan. He had word that Velazquez, angered by Cortes's disobedience in leaving Cuba when he did, had sent another expeditionary force, not only to subdue the Mexicans, but to bring Cortes himself to heel. In his absence, the troops were placed under the

command of Pedro de Alvarado, who was understandably nervous about this great responsibility.

### **Rebellion**

The Aztec nobility gathered to celebrate a religious festival, the Toxcatl. Alvarado panicked, thinking it was an uprising, and ordered their massacre. This sparked off a real rebellion, and Alvarado eventually ended up besieged in the Palace of Axayacatl. This was the situation which faced Cortes when he returned on 24th June.

Three days later, Montezuma, who had been well treated by his captors and thought the situation could be resolved by diplomacy and negotiation, appeared in public to try to put an end to the rebellion. But the people would not listen to him. Instead, considering him to be a traitor, the more fanatical resisters of Spanish rule stoned him to death.

Three days later, surrounded on all sides, Cortes and his men were obliged to withdraw from the city under cover of darkness. They had to fight their way out, and this night became known as 'la Noche Triste', the Night of Sadness, as almost half the Spanish forces were killed.

Cortes and his remaining men regrouped and, with the help of their non-Aztec allies, they began to lay siege to Tenochtitlan. They were helped by the fact that an epidemic of smallpox had broken out in the city. Ironically, this disease had hitherto been unknown in Mexico, and had in fact been carried there by the Spanish.

Montezuma had been succeeded by one of his nephews, but he had died of smallpox and another nephew had taken power, 18 year-old Cuauhtemoc, whose name meant 'the eagle who falls'. For almost three months he held out heroically against the Conquistadors, but on 13th August 1521, it was not only the eagle who fell, but his capital too.

The Spanish destroyed the city of Tenochtitlan and rebuilt their own capital, naming it Ciudad Mexico, or Mexico City.

Tenochtitlan had been a splendid city of sophisticated design, home to around 700,000 people. At its heart had stood the great Teocalli, the temple where the Aztecs had worshipped their cruel gods. When Cortes first arrived in the city, Montezuma had taken him by the hand and led him up the 114 steps of the Teocalli, where he proudly showed him the panorama of markets, roads, houses and canals spread out before them. At first, the Spanish could not help but be impressed, but they saw the other side of the coin in the interior of the Teocalli, where the bodies of the victims of human sacrifice lay rotting. Perhaps it was then that they realised the Aztecs could not after all be brought peacefully into submission as they had hoped at first.

The Teocalli was finally razed to the ground and the stones from it were used to construct the magnificent cathedral of San Francisco, to the greater glory of God.

### **Men of War and Men of God**

The Aztec Empire had been destroyed forever, but the bloodshed was not yet over. The capital belonged to the Spanish, and they were well-received in some parts of the country, which they now called New Spain, but they met with resistance from many tribes, notably the Maya. They were not conquered until 1547 at Yucatan, and in fact the interior of their region was to remain independent until the end of the 17th century.

The main aim of the Spanish was the economic exploitation of the country and its people, but they also realised their responsibility to introduce the conquered Indians to the Catholic Faith.

Queen Isabella of Spain held a council with clergymen, theologians and men of law. They reached the conclusion that the Indians did indeed have souls, and therefore it was the duty of the Spanish to convert them. Indians were to be considered free men and subjects of the crown. They also decreed that the Indians were to work for the benefit of the settlers, but that they in turn must guarantee the spiritual and material welfare of their workers. This system was known as *encomienda*, there was however, a great abuse of it by the Spanish colonists.

There had been a few chaplains with Cortes's original force, but now Cortes wrote to Spain requesting that missionaries be sent over. He specified that, in his opinion, it

would be better to send monks or friars, particularly Franciscans and Dominicans, rather than secular priests, as the latter were more likely to be swayed by the riches so easily obtainable in the country and might not always set a good example.

### **Missionaries in Mexico**

So the first missionaries arrived, almost all of them Franciscans or Dominicans, as Cortes had advised.

They set to work with a will. Their first task was to master the native languages, of which there were many, the main one being Nahuatl. They also taught many of the Indians Spanish.

They destroyed the temples and shrines of the old gods and built Catholic churches and monasteries in their place.

Fighting was still going on in many areas, so these buildings were often fortified. As a reflection of the poverty to which the monks were vowed, they were very austere and simple in style, owing more to Gothic and medieval architecture than to the more ornate Renaissance style then current in Europe.

Music played an important part in the religion and lives of the Indians. It was their priests who passed on musical traditions, and the Spanish missionaries, wishing to eliminate all trace of the old religions, decided to encourage the people to learn the music of Christianity rather than paganism.

A mere three years after the fall of Tenochtitlan, the first school of music was founded at Texcoco by a Franciscan, Pedro de Gand. Another Franciscan, Bernardino de Sahagun, translated the *Psalmody Christiana* into Nahuatl. A naturally musical people, the Mexican Indians were quick to adopt European sacred music and European musical instruments.

Schools were built, and in 1529 the first university in the Americas was constructed.

The missionaries introduced agricultural techniques which had been unknown in the country, as well as introducing new crops, wheat in particular.

They also treated the sick in the hospitals they built, using techniques which would seem primitive to us now, but which at the time were more advanced than anything previously used in Mexico.

In addition, the friars performed the very important role of protecting the natives from the abuses of the colonists. In spite of the *encomienda* system, under which they were supposed to be taken care of and educated by their Spanish 'masters', many Indians were in fact being used as slaves.

Soldiers and friars were by no means the only Spanish people in New Spain now. Attracted by the promise of wealth the country had to offer, farmers, artisans, traders and administrators were settling there in droves. Unfortunately, many of them looked upon the native

Mexicans as little better than animals and treated them very harshly. The missionaries could not prevent this entirely, but they did their best. It was a situation which often led to conflict, and many of the friars showed great courage in defying abusive colonists.

If the Indians feared and despised the majority of Spaniards, they were much impressed by the missionaries, and hundreds of thousands of them willingly converted to Catholicism.

The charge often levelled at the friars was that, wishing to convert as many Indians as possible, they gave them only superficial instruction, with the result that many had an incomplete understanding of the Faith, and in fact continued to worship their old gods under new names. This may have happened in a few isolated cases, but generally the missionaries were at great pains to ensure that the Indians had put their old gods behind them when they converted.

Churches and shrines dedicated to Christ or His Holy Mother were often erected in places where a shrine or temple to a pagan god or goddess had been, but the friars were careful that no one should confuse them.

They were very careful in their use of language, too. When giving a potential convert instruction in his native tongue, they never translated the Spanish words for God, the Virgin Mary or a saint into the words which the natives used for their gods and goddesses. They simply

used the Spanish words, to emphasise the fact that Christianity had nothing to do with the old pagan religions.

Many converts took Spanish names when they embraced the Faith. One of these was St Juan Diego, who was to be singled out to carry a very important message to Mexico and to the world.

## OUR LADY AND ST JUAN DIEGO

In 1531 St Juan Diego was 57 years old. He was a convert to the Catholic Faith, and his religion had sustained him in his sorrow when his wife had passed away two years previously.

They had no children and Juan Diego lived with his old uncle. This uncle was also a convert, and had taken the name Juan Bernardino.

They lived in a village called Tulpetlac, some miles north of Mexico City. Their nearest church was quite a distance away, but it was a walk Juan Diego always undertook willingly. On Saturday, 9th December 1531, he was on his way to Mass. Unfortunately, his uncle could not accompany him, as he was in poor health. The 9th December was the date on which the feast of the Immaculate Conception was celebrated in Spain and its colonies.

All alone on the path, Juan Diego thought he heard music, a choir singing a beautiful song which seemed somehow unearthly. Then he heard a voice calling his name, quite distinctly. Surprised and curious, Juan Diego climbed a hill to see who could be calling him. There he saw a radiant young woman, an Indian who appeared to be around 16 years of age. Although the sun had not yet risen, she was bathed in light.

Juan Diego couldn't help but be startled, but any fear he might have felt soon disappeared when the young woman spoke to him in gentle tones. She spoke in Nahuatl, Juan Diego's native language, and asked him where he was going. He replied that he was hurrying to Holy Mass.

"Son", she told him, "I am Mary, the Mother of Our Lord."

When he heard these words, Juan Diego fell to his knees before her. The Blessed Virgin went on to tell him that she wished to help his people and all who sincerely turned to her for help, and that she wished a church to be built on the spot where they now stood, a hill called Tepeyac.

"Go to the Bishop in the city and tell him all you have seen and heard," she instructed him.

Juan Diego, overcome with emotion, promised to do as she asked.

Our Lady left him and he set out for Mexico City. He was determined to fulfil his promise to the Holy Mother, but was nonetheless very apprehensive as to how he would be received by the Bishop. After all, he was only an illiterate Indian worker.

The Bishop was a Dominican named Juan de Zumarraga. He received Juan Diego kindly. The Bishop could not speak Nahuatl and Juan Diego had not yet mastered the Spanish language, so their conversation was conducted through an interpreter, a certain Father Juan

Gonzalez, who was later to publish his testimony recounting all that he had seen and heard during Juan Diego's interviews with the Bishop.

Zummarraga listened attentively to Juan Diego's story of his meeting with the Virgin, and her request that a church be built at Tepeyac. He was impressed by the Indian convert's sincerity, but couldn't imagine why Our Lady would want a church built in such a deserted spot. All in all, he was not convinced. He told Juan Diego that what he had to say was very interesting, but that he would have to think things over. Thus, Juan Diego was gently, but firmly dismissed.

### **The Second Apparition**

It was sunset when Juan Diego reached the little hill at Tepeyac on his homeward journey. He was tired, hungry, and above all, feeling very guilty that he had not been convincing enough and failed in his promise to the Virgin. However, when he reached the top of the hill, the Queen of Heaven was waiting for him. He fell on his knees before her, all his troubles forgotten in her presence.

He told her what had happened during his visit to the Bishop and begged her forgiveness for having failed. He said that she ought to find someone more suited to the task than himself. Mary reassured him.

"My son," she said, "it is you I have chosen. Go back to the Bishop tomorrow, say you have seen me again, and repeat my request."

Juan Diego replied that he was not at all sure if the Bishop would listen to him, but he would certainly do as he was bid, and would come back to the hill at Tepeyac the following evening to tell the Blessed Virgin the results of his second visit to Bishop Zumarraga.

The next day was a Sunday, so Juan Diego went to Mass in the morning as usual. Then he set off once again to walk to Mexico City to see the Bishop.

He did as Our Lady had asked and said that he had seen her again, and that she told him to come back and repeat the request that a church be built at Tepeyac.

The Bishop was still not entirely convinced, but he had taken a liking to Juan Diego and was touched by his piety.

“I’m sure you understand why I cannot build a church just on what you have told me. When you see the Blessed Virgin again, ask her to give me a sign directly from herself, an unmistakable sign, and then I will build the church.”

### **The Third Apparition**

Again, Juan Diego found the Mother of God waiting for him at the hill of Tepeyac. He knelt before her and repeated what the Bishop had said. Mary told him to come back the following day at dawn and she would give him a sign to take to the Bishop, one which would convince him of the truth of what Juan Diego said.

Juan Diego bade Our Lady farewell, and promised to come back the following morning. All his doubts about himself had gone. He was sure that the Holy Mother would help him carry out the mission she had entrusted him with.

However, when Juan Diego reached home that evening he found his uncle very ill indeed with fever. He prepared medicine for him and sat up with him all night. When daybreak approached, he felt he could not leave his uncle alone to go to meet the Virgin as arranged. He was sure she would understand the reason for his absence. All next day he cared for his uncle, then on Tuesday morning, Juan Bernardino, fearing that the end was near, asked him to go to fetch a priest to administer the last Sacraments.

### **The Fourth Apparition**

On his way to fetch the priest, Our Lady appeared to him again. He explained why he hadn't come to see her at dawn the previous day, and asked her to excuse him, as he was in a great hurry to get the priest for his sick uncle.

The Virgin Mary told him that he had nothing to worry about, as she had already cured Juan Bernardino. She asked him to go to the top of the hill and gather the roses which were growing there.

Juan Diego was confused. He was so happy to think that his uncle could be cured so quickly. He was also wondering how roses could possibly be growing on top

of the hill. They did not usually grow there, and anyway, it was the month of December, when no roses were to be found anywhere.

When he reached the top of the hill, however, he saw dozens of beautiful red roses, dripping with dew, amongst the frost-covered cactus and rocks.

Like most Indians, Juan Diego wore a working apron, called a tilma. It was made of coarse fabric and was large enough to be used as a sort of cloak. He filled the tilma with the sweet-smelling roses and took them back to the Virgin Mary, who took them and rearranged them with her own hands. Then she tied the lower corners of the tilma behind Juan Diego's neck, covering the roses.

"My son", said Our Lady, "this is my sign for the Bishop. Don't let anyone see what you have in the tilma until you are before the Bishop himself. Tell him I made your uncle well again, and that I myself arranged the roses like this. He will believe you, you'll see".

Bishop Zumarraga received Juan Diego for the third time. He may have had an inkling that he was really going to see the sign he had asked for, as, in addition to the interpreter, he called in several more witnesses.

Juan Diego told him what the Virgin had said, then he untied his tilma. The beautiful roses fell to his feet around him, spreading their fragrance throughout the room. Then Juan Diego looked down at the front of his tilma and saw that the Blessed Virgin had left there a sign more beautiful

and wondrous by far than the roses. There, imprinted on the coarse cloth, was an image of the Mother of Our Lord in all her glory, just as he had seen her.

The Bishop and everyone else in the room fell to their knees. They were overcome with awe. It was obvious to them all that everything Juan Diego had said had been the truth.

### **The Church is Built**

Filled with joy and wonder, Bishop Zumarraga took the tilma from Juan Diego and reverently carried it into his own chapel, where, with great care, he attached it to the wall next to the altar.

It was not long before news of the miraculous image spread, and the next day a great crowd had gathered outside the Bishop's residence. It was decided to put the tilma on display in the Cathedral, where everyone would be able to see it. Quite a procession accompanied the Bishop and Juan Diego on the way to the Cathedral. The tilma was duly attached to the wall there, and soon the Cathedral was filled with people coming to see the sign Our Lady had given, and to pray to her.

The Spanish priests and monks were, of course, thrilled, and realised that Our Lady's special gift would help them greatly in their work of converting the Indians. The Indian converts, for their part, knew that the Mother of God had not forgotten them in their need, and was

there to give them her assistance in their lives which were often full of suffering and troubles due to the harsh treatment of their Spanish 'masters'.

The Bishop felt that the Virgin should be obeyed as soon as possible, and asked Juan Diego to show him and his companions the hill where she wanted the church to be built.

Juan Diego did so, and then they went to see his uncle. He was in perfect health, as Juan Diego had known he would be from what Our Lady had told him. He told his uncle the story of his meetings with the Holy Virgin and the appearance of the image on the tilma. Juan Bernardino had a story to tell, too.

He had been lying in great distress, tossing and turning with a high fever. His one hope was that his nephew would return with the priest in time, that he might make his peace with God and receive the Sacraments. Suddenly, the room was filled with a soft light. He opened his eyes and saw a beautiful young woman standing beside him.

In Nahuatl, she told him of her meetings with Juan Diego and how she had put the picture of herself on his tilma. She told him that she and her picture were to be called Our Lady of the serpent who is crushed. Then she left him and he felt the fever go and health return to him. He had eagerly awaited his nephew's coming. In the Nahuatl language the word for the serpent who is crushed

is coatlaxopeuh, pronounced 'quatlasupe'. The Spaniards present whose knowledge of the language was imperfect thought Juan Bernardino had spoken of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This made perfect sense to them, as Guadalupe was, and still is, the site of a famous Marian shrine in Spain. It seemed right and proper that Our Lady of Guadalupe should have chosen to appear in New Spain.

### **The Immaculate Conception**

The interpreter explained the true meaning of the Nahuatl term, and obvious reference to the Immaculate Conception. It was the serpent who tempted Eve to commit the sin which led to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The Blessed Virgin was conceived without the stain of original sin, which is why she is often portrayed crushing a serpent under her feet. However, despite this explanation, the name Our Lady of Guadalupe struck a chord with the Spaniards, so far from their native land, and it is by that name that the picture became known forever more.

When the Indian converts heard that the Blessed Virgin had given instructions that a church was to be built at Tepeyac for them, they flocked to the hill. There were hundreds of volunteers to help build it, and it was completed in just two weeks. Our Lady's wish had been fulfilled.

On 26th December, the sacred image was brought from the Cathedral to the new church in a great procession. Even Hernan Cortes took part.

Most of the Indians were in their own traditional garb, and they were so full of joy after the image of the Virgin was placed in the church that they began to dance and sing. During the dancing, one young Indian stumbled and fell against the spear carried by one of his friends. He suffered a wound in the neck which began to bleed copiously. He collapsed and was losing blood so rapidly he was soon unconscious and near death. Two of his friends carried him to the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe and begged her to help him. Suddenly the young man's eyes opened, the bleeding stopped, and he got to his feet. Our Lady had not betrayed their trust in her, and had saved his life. This was the first miracle due to the intervention of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Many, many more were to follow.

### **Our Lady and the Mexican Identity**

Significantly, the spot where the Blessed Virgin chose to appear to her servant, Juan Diego, had once been the site of a temple to the mother goddess, called Tonantzin. This was where the church was built, a perfect symbol of the casting-off of the old pagan religions of the Mexican Indians and the embracing of the Catholic Faith.

While many Indians had converted, others had stuck to their old ways. While they saw the good being done by the missionaries, they also saw the hard, sometimes barbaric, treatment meted out by the Spaniards to their Indian workers. Such people did not set a good example,

being nominally Catholics, but behaving in a way quite contrary to their religion. However, with the appearance of the Virgin Mary to Juan Diego and the miraculous image on view for all to see, a great many of those who had previously been sceptical turned towards Catholicism. They realised that it was not just the white man's religion, but a religion for all, no matter what the colour of their skin or their station in life. After all, was not the Virgin in the picture of the same race as themselves, and had she not chosen to appear to a poor illiterate Indian peasant?

Amongst the Spaniards, though, there were many doubters. There were those, among them even certain churchmen, who thought the whole thing was a 'put-up job' on the part of the Church to win more Indian converts. There were also those whose limited knowledge of what was supposed to be their own religion could not let them imagine that the Virgin Mary could take the appearance of a brown-skinned Indian girl, or that she would bother to appear to someone like Juan Diego. Of course there were, too, those Spaniards whose faith was such that they realised that Our Lady had conferred a special privilege on the country they called New Spain. Most of the clergy, naturally, encouraged devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe to deepen the faith of the converts, who were led to a greater understanding of God through His Holy Mother.

However, it would be true to say that for a long time Our Lady of Guadalupe was regarded as a particularly Indian devotion. Spaniards tended to turn more towards the Virgin of Los Remedios, whose statue had been brought from Spain to Mexico by Cortes's Conquistadors.

In 1737 there was a terrible outbreak of typhoid in Mexico City and its outskirts. Hundreds died, and it looked as though there was no way to stop the terrible sickness from spreading. It was even feared that it could spread to other parts of the country. Our Lady of Guadalupe was appealed to by the faithful of the city. Masses were said and prayers offered in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Mary is never invoked in vain, and the typhoid epidemic stopped as suddenly as it had started.

Hundreds of miracles had been reported as having been due to the intervention of the Virgin of Guadalupe, but it was because of the ending of the typhoid outbreak that she was officially proclaimed Patroness of New Spain.

### **Church and State in New Spain**

The Catholic Church was a unifying force in New Spain. Its power was second only to that of the King of Spain and his representatives in the colony. In fact, King Carlos III of Spain felt that the Church was becoming rather too powerful. There were stirrings of a desire for independence from Spain, and this desire found some support

among the clergy, in particular the Jesuits. Two-thirds of the population were Creoles, that is to say, people of Spanish descent who had been born in the colony. The rest of the population at that time was made up of Spaniards who had been sent out from Spain, Indians, and Mestizos, who were people of mixed race born of unions between Spanish and Indian.

Carlos III decided to expel all the Jesuits from New Spain, a very drastic measure indeed, as so many of them had been born there, and they played a very important part in the administrative, educational and spiritual life of the country.

Carlos's next move, in 1804, was to demand the transfer of the not inconsiderable funds possessed by the Church in New Spain into the coffers of the Spanish Crown. The result was economic chaos, and an ever-increasing number of people calling for independence, which was exactly the opposite of what Carlos had intended.

In 1808 Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Spain, obliged the King to abdicate, and put his own brother, Joseph Bonaparte, on the throne, proclaiming him King of Spain and all her colonies. Spanish control over Mexico became tenuous, to say the least, although many remained loyal to the deposed king.

### **The Fight for Mexican Independence**

On 10th September 1810, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a Creole priest in the parish of Dolores, approximately 130 miles away from Mexico City, launched a call to rebellion against the Spanish, which became known as the *Grito de Dolores*. Six days later, a group of rebels, under Hidalgo y Costilla and a nationalist army captain named Ignacio Allende, launched the first armed uprising. Their battle-cry was “Long live the Americas! Down with the evil government! Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe!”

Our Lady of Guadalupe had become so identified with the country that her name was used as a rallying-cry for those who wished independence from Spain. The nationalists even fought under a banner bearing her image. For them, the Virgin of Guadalupe represented Mexico, as opposed to colonial New Spain.

The royalists fought under a banner which bore the image of the Virgin of Los Remedios, the ‘Spanish’ Virgin. Each side was convinced that ‘their’ Virgin would help them to victory, apparently not realising that Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Virgin of Los Remedios were of course one and the same. They did not seem to realise either that the image of the Mother of the Prince of Peace was perhaps inappropriate on a banner which would lead men into battle to fight and kill one another.

The fight for independence was to be a long and bitter one. It was not until 1836 that Spain finally recognised

the independence of Mexico. But the fighting was not over. The nineteenth century was a very troubled one for Mexico, with internal conflicts, a war against the United States, a conflict with France and another with Austria. The early twentieth century was to see a revolution led by Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. Internal power struggles and political instability caused a great divide between the wealthy minority and the majority of Mexicans, most of whom live in poverty. It was only in the 1990s that there began to be a glimmer of hope that Mexico could become a prosperous, democratic nation.

Although one of the leaders of the original independence movement was a priest, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, the persecution of the Church begun by Carlos III did not end with independence. On the contrary, Mexican leaders of all political persuasions feared the power and the influence of the Church, and terrible restrictions were placed on the rights of the clergy. For example, they were not allowed to run Catholic schools. Most of these restrictions were lifted around 1940, but Mexico still officially did not recognise the Vatican until the early 1990s, when relations were re-established by President Carlos Salinas, who realised what an important role the Catholic Church played in his country.

For many years, Mexico was one of the most fiercely secular states in the world, but, paradoxically, the Mexican people were among the most devoutly Catholic

in the world. Throughout all the turmoil, there was very little falling-away from the Faith. This can largely be attributed to the devotion Mexicans have always had to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

No government actually went so far as to prohibit Catholic worship, no doubt fearing a popular uprising.

However, in 1921 anti-clerical fanatics placed a bomb under the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Basilica. It exploded during High Mass, but not only was no one injured, the picture itself was completely untouched by the blast.

The only damage was to a Crucifix which was bent out of shape. It can still be seen in the Basilica Museum.

Our Lady of Guadalupe has been the one great unifying factor in Mexico. She has been revered by Mexicans of all races and political persuasions for so many years that she can truly be said to have become a symbol of the Mexican nation. She is honoured throughout the Americas, and was also declared Patroness of the Philippines by Pope Pius XI in 1935.

On the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe on 12th December, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans come to the Basilica. They come from all over Mexico, and also from other countries. Rich and poor, Creoles, Mestizos and Indians are united in their veneration of the Mother of God, all distinctions forgotten, equal in the sight of God.

End of booklet sample. Find more and order online:

**<http://www.ignatius-cts.com/>**