

The Way of St. Francis



Our Lady of Guadalupe

Our Lady of Guadalupe: What's in a Name?

BY MAUREEN K. DAY

Saint Barbara Province, along with five other provinces of the Order of Friars Minor (OFM) coast-to-coast, are preparing to join together during the coming year. Their new province will be named after Our Lady of Guadalupe. A letter explaining the name choice for this revitalization says, in part, “Our Lady of Guadalupe proclaims that we should learn from God what it means to approach each other with humility: learning, accepting others, and forever traveling

from head to heart. For centuries, she has represented values that are fundamental to our Order: a commitment to justice, to standing alongside the oppressed.”

I’m sure there will be plenty of reflection on the ties between Our Lady of Guadalupe and Franciscan vision. Here are four ties that I see:

- 1. She gathers and includes everyone.**
We see this when she claims all races



Photo by Tom Bean

Friars are “men of the people,” from New York to LA and beyond. Here, at Whiteriver, Arizona, Fr. Eddie Fronske, OFM, greets grateful parishioners.



Photo: Jim McIntosh, Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Our Lady of Guadalupe, portrayed in various ways in different churches, has the same message: Christ-bearer, lover of every person, especially the poor.

as her children. Her words to St. Juan Diego (see box on p. 12) are described in a 16th-century foundational document, *Nican Mopohua*. (Other quotes in this article come from that same document.) She tells him, “I am truly your compassionate mother, yours and of all the people who live together in this land, and of all the other people of different ancestries.” While embracing the beauty of our differences, we all are part of one human family.

2. She wants a deep encounter with us.

She manifests the love of a mother and desires that her children know their worth and goodness. In Juan Diego’s encounters with her, she is de-

scribed as “extremely kind, as if she were drawing him toward her and esteemed him highly.”

When he decided to postpone her request to again see the bishop so that he might retrieve a priest to anoint his dying uncle, he became fearful and repentant when she caught him. But she reassured him lovingly, “Am I not here, I, who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection?...Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms?” She absolutely adores us and wants the chance to prove it.

3. She is tender toward the most vulnerable.

She holds a special place in her heart for those who are hurting when she promises, “I will listen to their weeping, their sadness, to remedy, to cleanse and nurse all their different troubles, their miseries, their

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Juan Diego and Our Lady

of Guadalupe

The basics of Our Lady of Guadalupe's origin story are familiar to many. In December of 1531, Juan Diego, an indigenous Catholic of Mexico, was on his way to Mass when Mary appeared to him on Tepeyac Hill. She told him to go to the bishop and tell him that she wanted a shrine built in her honor there, where she would bless all those who implored her for help. The bishop told Juan Diego that he needed proof of her appearance.

When Juan Diego returned for this proof, she directed him to the top of the hill where they had previously met. There he found a variety of roses, which was totally unexpected given the frost. Juan Diego gathered the roses in his cloak, his *tilma*, and went to the bishop. Once there, Juan Diego opened his *tilma*. Roses spilled across the floor, and impressed on his *tilma* was the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. That *tilma* is preserved and venerated today at Our Lady of Guadalupe shrine in Mexico City. It's the most visited Catholic shrine in the world.

The image is a wonder. Some of the pieces of the image turn the viewer heavenward. Mary stands upon a black crescent moon supported by an angel. Backlit in the best way, the sun casts its radiance around her. Her mantle is showered in stars. And other aspects ground us in our material world, like the black sash tied round her waist indicating that she is pregnant.

Her features have been described by some as indigenous and by others as mestizo; either way she is a Mary who looks like the people she appeared to.—M.K.D.





Photo courtesy of St. Francis Center Facebook

A lay volunteer (r) joins in service here at St. Francis Center in Los Angeles.

suffering.” Rather than abandon us in our darkest hour, she rushes toward us. While she might not fix what ails us, she offers real presence in her consoling accompaniment.

4. She opts for the poor. Our Lady chose someone whom society thought little of to be her special servant. When the bishop appeared not to believe Juan Diego, this poor man said to Our Lady, “I beg you, my Lady, Queen, my Beloved Maiden, to have one of the nobles who are held in esteem, one who is known, respected, honored, have him carry, take your dear breath, your dear word, so that he will be believed. Because I am really just a man from the country...a man of no importance...that place you are sending me to is a place where I'm not used to going to or spending any time in.”

He is referred to as the “humble man” and the “lowly Indian” in the text. Her choice for the poor is a reminder that if we are not fortunate enough to be born among the lowly, like Juan Diego or the Holy Family, then we must place ourselves among them. That’s what St. Francis did in

many ways, most famously among the poor and the lepers.

As with any saint, even though we get excited about the origin story, it should always point us to our destination story. Six of the OFM provinces gathering into one under the star-laden mantle of Our Lady indeed acknowledges and celebrates the event on Tepeyac nearly 500 years ago. The choice of name, though, is also about the significance of that event for us today and going forward.

What reminders do we need about tenderness toward the vulnerable and opting for the poor as we rethink our priorities? Who are we called to include and accompany? Can we muster the courage for encounter, even as the specter of dismissal and rejection looms?

As we consider these questions and more, may we proceed with a determined hope—that’s what the encounter of St. Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe is all about. ❖

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