

The Story of Our Lady of Guadalupe



The feast in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe goes back to the 16th century. Chronicles of that period tell us the story.

A poor Indian named Cuauhtlatohuac was baptized and given the name Juan Diego. He was a 57-year-old widower and lived in a small village near Mexico City. On Saturday morning December 9, 1531, he was on his way to a nearby barrio to attend Mass in honor of Our Lady.

Juan was walking by a hill called Tepeyac when he heard beautiful music like the warbling of birds. A radiant cloud appeared, and within it stood an Indian maiden dressed like an Aztec princess. The lady spoke to him in his own language and sent him to the bishop of Mexico, a Franciscan named Juan de Zumarraga. The bishop was to build a chapel in the place where the lady appeared.

Eventually the bishop told Juan to have the lady give him a sign. About this same time Juan's uncle became seriously ill. This led poor Juan to try to avoid the lady. Nevertheless, the lady found Juan, assured him that his uncle would recover, and provided roses for Juan to carry to the bishop in his cape or tilma.

On December 12, when Juan Diego opened his tilma in the bishop's presence, the roses fell to the ground, and the bishop sank to his knees. On the tilma where the roses had been appeared an image of Mary exactly as she had appeared at the hill of Tepeyac.

Reflection

Mary's appearance to Juan Diego as one of his people is a powerful reminder that Mary—and the God who sent her—accept all peoples. In the context of the sometimes rude and cruel treatment of the Indians by the Spaniards, the apparition was a rebuke to the Spaniards and an event of vast significance for the indigenous population. While a number of them had converted before this incident, they now came in droves. According to a contemporary chronicler, nine million Indians became Catholic in a very short time. In these days when we hear so much about God's preferential option for the poor, Our Lady of Guadalupe cries out to us that God's love for and identification with the poor is an age-old truth that stems from the Gospel itself.