

## HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE – DECEMBER 12

On this Feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we are given the opportunity to reflect on a few particular aspects of our relationship with Mary as our mother, namely the tenderness with which she cares for us and the way in which she cooperates with God's plan in sending us to be the presence of her Son in the world today. Historically speaking, Our Lady's apparitions to St. Juan Diego in December of 1531 had a monumentally important role in the spread of Christianity in Mexico, but I'd like for us to reflect for a bit on how those blessed encounters must have personally impacted St. Juan Diego and how they can impact us in our priestly ministry.

When reading the accounts of the conversations between Our Lady and Juan Diego, one is struck by their familiarity and the tenderness that they share. Our Lady often calls St. Juan Diego, "the smallest of my sons," referring to his humility, but what is even more telling is that he addressed her with the same familiarity and tenderness, calling her "my child, the smallest of my daughters, my Lady." In these exchanges, we get a privileged glimpse of Mary's personality, if you will, as well as an image of a son of Mary who knows and trusts his Mother.

St. Juan Diego has the confidence to address her in this way, because he is firmly rooted in his identity, he knows that he is a beloved son. "Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven," (Mt. 18:4). Our Lady assures him of her love and care for him, as any good mother would do, and we see this in a powerful way when Juan Diego's uncle falls gravely ill. Juan Diego is sent to the nearby city to find a priest to come and anoint his uncle, delaying the saint from fulfilling Mary's request that he go to the local bishop and ask that a chapel be built on the spot where she appeared. This situation distresses him so much that he takes another route to avoid seeing her on the way! Nonetheless, she meets him on the other side of the hill and reassures him, saying,

*Listen and hold this in your heart, oh, smallest of my sons: Let nothing frighten you, let nothing afflict you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and let nothing upset you... Am I not here, I who am your mother? Are you not under my protection? Am I not the fount of all of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, within my embrace? Have you need of anything else? Do not let your uncle's illness distress you. Be assured that he has already been cured.*

For us today, the central message does not have to do so much with the miraculous cure of his uncle, for we all know that even the noblest of prayer requests that we offer on a person's behalf sometimes is not within the Lord's will. Rather, the central message in this case is that *our mother is with us*. "Am I not here, I who am your mother?" This question is directed at us today just as it was to Juan Diego on that blessed morning. Are you isolated from your brother priests and struggling with loneliness? Are your parish finances already in the red, with the cost of roof repairs still pending? Are you discouraged by your people's complacency despite your best efforts to move them? Is your prayer life inconsistent, at best? Are you battling an addiction? Let not our hearts be troubled. Our mother is here, and she will know what to do, even if we don't. She even consoles us and teaches us to wait for the Lord, opening to Him and receiving all that we need from Him just as she does. And as we learn to imitate St. Juan Diego's childlike confidence in her intercession, the prayer that comes from our priestly hearts will be united more and more with the desires of the Heart of Jesus her Son.



When Our Lady appeared to St. Juan Diego upon the hill at Tepeyac, she did so in order to make of him an instrument for the evangelization of his people. At first, he accepted his mission with great zeal and excitement, but upon encountering difficulties, he began to doubt that he was worthy of the task. He returned to his Lady, saying,

*My Lady, my maiden, I presented your message to the Bishop, but it seemed that he did not think it was the truth. For this reason I beg you to entrust your message to someone more illustrious who might convey it in order that they may believe it, for I am only an insignificant man.*

The very same doubts can sometimes enter into our hearts when our mission becomes difficult, for who among us is worthy of this vocation, in himself? Nonetheless, Mary helps to prepare us for the task to which Our Lord has called us. She did likewise to Juan Diego that day, saying,

*I have many messengers, whom I could send to deliver my message, but it is very necessary that you go personally... and that by your hand, my wish will be accomplished... you are my messenger, I place all of my trust in you.*

Our mother can pick us up and inspire us to keep going whenever we fall flat on our faces or feel discouraged. She can form our hearts after the Heart of her Son and teach us to allow the grace we receive in the Sacrament of Holy Orders to take root in us more and more each day, bringing about the redemption of our bodies. The Redemption of our bodies and the understanding of Nuptial union is beautifully articulated in Pope St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. It is from this Sacrament and from our union with the Bridegroom in our celibate vocation that we receive our identity, and thus manifest the human presence of Jesus in the world today as *alter Christi*. We are sons of God and sons of Mary, we enjoy a nuptial union with the Lord in our celibate vocation, and as we are conformed to Bridegroom, we give ourselves to the Bride. The people of God know this; they sense it in their hearts. Recently, I had the privilege of being with a family at the hospital as they prepared for the death of their son who suffered a sudden blood clot in his brain. A local pastor, who was not Catholic, had visited them the day before. After I arrived we were gathered together, and with beautiful simplicity the man's aunt asked me, "Father, is there a difference between a priest and another minister? With you here, it just *feels* different..." In all humility, and painfully conscious of my own faults in that very moment, I had to respond, "Yes, there is." Through the physical presence of the priest, through our very bodies, Jesus gives His consolation to His people. Mary, as our mother, can teach us how to confidently, yet humbly manifest this presence of Christ in the world. In other words, we depend on our mother as her sons to conform our lives to her Son's. As she is completely united with God's will, she chooses, calls, and prepares us for our mission. Many priests, most notably our beloved late Holy Father Pope St. John Paul II, have entrusted their vocation to Mary with the childlike confidence of St. Juan Diego, and we would all do well to follow their example.

*Mother Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, teach us to trust in your tender guidance and love for us as your sons. Help us to live out our vocation faithfully, humbly, and confidently, so that all of our children might be saved. We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Great High Priest. Amen.*



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