



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Homily for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

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“How does it happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” With these words, which we have just heard from Luke’s Gospel, Elizabeth greets her cousin Mary with joy and humility.

She greets her with joy because she shares with Mary the blessings of motherhood. She greets her with humility because she has recognized that it is indeed the Lord her God that Mary carries in her womb.

How does it happen to us, that the Mother of our Lord should come to us? For the past two thousand years, the Blessed Virgin Mary has appeared in many places and to various people throughout the world: from France to Ireland to Portugal to Vietnam. And for these past two thousand years, her mission has been the same: she has come to bring all her children—that is, all of us—to her Son, Christ the Lord.

And so it was on December ninth, 1531, on the outskirts of Mexico City, that Our Lady chose to present herself to the people of the New World. She appeared to Juan Diego, an Aztec Indian, who, though in his fifties, had only converted to the Catholic faith six years earlier. Yet it was precisely because he was a recent convert that he still possessed a childlike innocence, an openness, in trusting that what he experienced was indeed true.

Appearing as a young Aztec maiden, Our Lady identified herself as the Mother of God to Juan Diego, and requested that he should go to the bishop and ask that a Temple be built in her name for the worship of God. He immediately went on that day to place before Bishop Zumarraga Our Lady’s request. The bishop listened politely, but sent the Juan Diego away.

Returning to the hillside where Our Lady had first met him, Juan Diego asked that she send someone of more importance to whom the bishop would listen, but Mary told him that he was to be the one to carry the message. On the next day Juan Diego once again went to the bishop who again listened politely to his story. But thinking that this was all a hoax, Bishop Zumarraga asked that Our Lady should give him a sign to prove the truth of what Juan Diego was telling him. Returning to Our Lady later that same day, Juan Diego received the assurance that he would be given a sign to take to the bishop on the following day.

Unfortunately, on December eleventh, Juan Diego’s uncle became gravely ill and so he spent the day caring for his uncle. As morning dawned on December twelfth, it was clear that his uncle was dying. Juan Diego departed quickly for



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Mexico City to find a priest so that his uncle could receive the Last Rites. However, before he could reach the city, Our Lady met him on the road and gently asked what was wrong. Juan Diego explained about his uncle and promised to return for the sign once he had gotten a priest for his uncle.

With compassion that only a mother can give, Our Lady promised that his uncle was already cured and said to Juan Diego, “Hear me and understand well, my son . . . , that nothing should frighten or grieve you. Let not your heart be disturbed. Do not fear that sickness, nor any other sickness or anguish. Am I not here, I who am your Mother? Are you not under my protection? Am I not your health? Are you not happily within my fold? What else do you wish? Do not grieve nor be disturbed by anything.”

Upon hearing these words, Juan Diego believed that his uncle would be healed and accepted the sign from Our Lady. She had him gather Castillian roses which were blooming on top of the mountain where they were—remember that it was December. Roses do not bloom when it is freezing and Castillian roses are not native to Mexico—Mary arranged the roses in his tilma (or cloak) and sent him off to the bishop, warning him to only open his tilma in the presence of the bishop. Once in the presence of Bishop Zumarraga, Juan Diego again repeated Our Lady’s request for a Temple to be built in her honor and opened his tilma, scattering the roses on the floor. But to the amazement of all gathered in the bishop’s house, the image which we venerate today had appeared on that tilma.

How does it happen to us, that the Mother of Our Lord should come to us? How does it happen to us, that the Mother of our Lord should give to us this image of her maternal care?

By the grace of God, Mary left us this image to teach us to let God play a part in our lives. All of us here know how difficult it is to do God’s will in our own lives, especially when we don’t let God be a part of our lives. Whenever I talk about the Sacrament of Reconciliation in class, someone will usually ask why he should confess something that he knows he’ll do again. But isn’t that what Reconciliation is about, asking God to help us overcome sinful habits?

We say we believe that God gives us the grace to do His will and to overcome sin, but do we truly believe that? We say our prayers asking for God’s help, but do we truly want to turn our hearts and minds to doing God’s will, trusting that God is with us to help us do His will, or do we push God aside and say, “My will, not yours, be done”?

When you look at this image of the Aztec Princess who is with child, what do you see? You see a woman at prayer. You see a woman who knows what it means to live in this world. You see a woman who knows the joys and sorrows of life. You see a woman who trusted that God was with her, helping her at all times.



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In this image, you see the Holy Mother of God praying for you and you and you and me. In this image, you see Our Lady asking God to help each one of us.

Listen again to Our Lady's words to Juan Diego, for these are words that she speaks to each one of us today, "Hear me and understand well, my son . . . , that nothing should frighten or grieve you. Let not your heart be disturbed. Do not fear . . . any . . . sickness or anguish. Am I not here, I who am your Mother? Are you not under my protection? Am I not your health? Are you not happily within my fold? What else do you wish? Do not grieve nor be disturbed by anything."

This is how it happens to us, that the Mother of Our Lord should come to us.