



Thoughts from Glenna Benton, Director of Children & Youth Faith Formation

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE In the midst of our Advent waiting, we experience and celebrate the feast of the Patroness and Queen of all the Americas, Our Lady of Guadalupe. In the darkness of winter, another light shines in our darkness and she is as radiant as the sun! With the attire and features of a pregnant Indian maiden, she speaks in the native Nahuatl tongue. I grew up in an area of California that was beautifully and strongly influenced by the Hispanic culture. Processions, mariachi music, decorated platforms carrying the image of Guadalupe, armfuls of red roses, and votive candles hold a special place in my faith memories and formation. The richness of the symbol and story enchanted me and she holds a place of honor in my own home.

The *Nican Mopohua* is the text of the memory of the events of 1531. It was written between 1540 and 1560 by a Nahuatl scholar, in the Nahuatl language, for the Nahuatl people. The Lady of Guadalupe stepped into a time of darkness and chaos and offered the people of the New World a place of refuge, respite and a new faith beginning. She spoke of a peaceful and joy-filled opportunity to bring the people, both the Spanish Christians and the indigenous peoples of the New World, together and to respond to God's love and mercy in the midst of the violence and upheaval caused by the clash of the European Christian conquerors and the crushed native Indian (Aztec) culture.

In the year 1531, a few days into December, a poor, dignified campesino, named Juan Diego, was making his way to the church where he was learning the things of God and God's messages. The seeds of Christian faith had already been planted in his heart but it was just ten years after the destruction and devastation of the Aztec empire by the Spanish. It was still dark and the distance to the church was about 14 miles from his home.

As he was nearing a small hill named Tepeyac, it was beginning to dawn. Juan "heard singing on the summit of the hill: as if different precious birds were singing their songs and their songs would alternate, as if the hill were answering them." The beautiful music drew Juan toward the summit, the direction from which the sun arises. As the music ended, he heard that he was being called, "Dignified Juan, dignified Juan Diego."

He approached the summit with joy and saw a lady standing and calling to him to come closer. It is said that "he marveled at her perfect beauty. Her clothing appeared like the sun, and it gave forth rays." These rays of light touched the barren hills, rocks and mesquite and they appeared like jewels and gold!

The Lady addressed him lovingly and told him, "Know and be certain in your heart, my most abandoned son, that I am the Ever-

Virgin Holy Mary, Mother of the God of Great Truth, Teotl, of the One through Whom We Live, the Creator of Persons, the Owner of What is Near and Together, of the Lord of Heaven and Earth."

Then she told Juan that he must go to the bishop and express her desire that a "hermitage, a home, a temple" be erected at this place where all could come together in a new place of love and peace.

Juan Diego met with the bishop four times and with the Lady, whom he knew to be the Mother of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, three more times. The skeptical bishop demanded a sign that Juan was indeed sent by the Lady from Heaven. When he again approached the Lady, she sent him to climb the hill where he first met her and, in the middle of icy December, he found exquisite, fragrant flowers. He gathered them from where they should not be growing and filled his cloak (tilma) with them. The Lady touched them and he took them to the bishop.

When Juan Diego brought them to the bishop, he repeated the Queen of Heaven's request. He opened his cloak to reveal the flowers and "in that very moment she painted herself: the precious image of the Ever-Virgin Holy Mary, Mother of God Teotl, appeared suddenly, just as she is today and is kept in her home, in the hermitage of Tepeyac, which is called Guadalupe."

Our Lady of Guadalupe is one of the most powerful religious symbols of our day. For centuries she has been a sustaining symbol of Mexican, Latin American, and U.S. Hispanic identity and spirituality. She has even wider significance in the universal church today. Virgil Elizando, a Mexican-American theologian, pastor, and popular speaker, has written a wonderful account and reflection entitled *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation*. He writes: "Guadalupe is not an isolated, abstract, doctrinal truth; neither is it a legalistic or moralistic truth. According to the Guadalupan vision, truth exists in the relational, the interconnected, the beautiful and the melodic; it cannot be reduced to a single, essential element, for it is only in its totality, in its wholeness, that this truth can be perceived and appreciated. Ultimate truth ... can only be approximated through *flor y canto* (flowers and song)... The most fascinating aspect of Guadalupe is that it introduces us to a more comprehensive and open-minded concept of God... The Spanish and Nahuatl concepts of God are beautifully combined to present us with an understanding of God that is fuller and richer than either one of them alone. Guadalupe purifies both notions of God, takes nothing away from their original manifestations, and enriches both. There is only one God who is known in various ways, and our Lady is the mother of that God."

My faith, my image of God, my life have been influenced and enriched by Our Lady of Guadalupe. I will always bring her red roses of love.