



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

December 12th is the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I had planned to go see the "Tilma" in Mexico City this past November, but with COVID-19 that was cancelled (the pilgrimage has been rescheduled for October of 2021). This incredible and miraculous apparition brought new life to this newly discovered continent, and can be a sign of God's continued love pouring out upon us today.

In 1519, Cortez disembarked in Mexico, leading 500 soldiers. He conquered the country for Spain, but he also wanted to bring the love of Jesus to the Aztecs, who practiced horrible abominations in their religion, such as human sacrifice. In 1524, he was able to get twelve Franciscans to come to Mexico, but while the natives appreciated the gentleness of the missionaries, they were reluctant to accept Baptism. They did not want to embrace the change of life required by Baptism, specifically abandoning the practice of polygamy. Even though the conversion rate was low, there were some natives who converted and were baptized, including a man named Cuauhtlatoazin, and his wife. Cuauhtlatoazin took the name Juan Diego at his baptism.

On December 9, 1531, Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego as he was going to Mass. She said, "I am your merciful Mother to you and to all mankind who love me and trust in me and invoke my help." She instructed him to go to the Bishop and ask that he build a church in the place where she appeared. Over the next few days, Juan Diego went back and forth between Our Lady and the Bishop (who was skeptical). The Bishop required a sign.

On December 12th, in the midst of a frost, St. Juan Diego was beckoned up the hill again and Our Lady placed blooming Castilian roses on his Tilma as the sign for the Bishop. When Juan Diego met with the Bishop, he told him that he had the sign, and opened his Tilma. Not only did these miraculous flowers drop to the floor before the Bishop, but there was an image of Our Lady imprinted on the Tilma!



This is the sign.

Over the years, the Tilma has been subject to many tests (even done by NASA), and on many different levels, it is miraculous... not the least of which is that the Tilma is still in one piece centuries later. I encourage you to look up the many different miracles that are part of the Tilma (the eyes, the coloring, the baby in Mary's womb, etc). Beyond the miraculous nature of the Tilma, it is also deeply symbolic. The symbols spoke the "language" of the native people of the time. After Our Lady's appearance, the natives understood the message from heaven and began converting in droves. Within nine years, 9,000,000 natives had chosen to be Baptized, giving up their pagan ways, human sacrifice, and even the practice of polygamy. Even as Christian Europe was being divided, and millions were leaving the Catholic Church as part of the Reformation, millions were entering the Church in the "new world" because of this act from Heaven.

What love Our Lord has for us, that He would send His own Mother to us to show us that we are beloved to Him! In our own day, as the world is such a mess, we can look to Our Lady of Guadalupe as a sign that we are loved. No matter what is going on in our world, God has a plan to draw good out of evil, and to draw us to His Heart.

I'll close by letting Our Lady's words to St. Juan Diego speak to each of us:

Hear me and understand well, ... 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, 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.