

# *Introduction*

Why did the Blessed Virgin Mary appear to St. Juan Diego near what is now Mexico City in December 1531, and what is the relevance today of Our Lady of Guadalupe's apparition?

Why should the people of the Archdiocese of Atlanta undertake a period of special devotion to Our Blessed Lady and her Son, especially when she appeared so long ago and so far away?

Why a Coronation of Our Lady of Guadalupe?

Why a Renewal of the Consecration of our Archdiocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary?

## *Guadalupe, Mexico: 1531*

The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego, an Aztec Indian convert to the Faith, in December 1531. In a series of apparitions, she sent Juan Diego to the local bishop, Juan de Zumarraga, O.F.M., to ask that he might build a sanctuary to her son. In order that the bishop would believe that it was indeed Mary who sent Juan Diego, Mary sent him with two miraculous signs: roses—in the middle of winter and of a variety that did not grow in that part of Mexico—and an image of herself imprinted on Diego's tilma.

The miraculous image not only proved that the request came from Mary, but it was also a codex, a collection of symbols that were full of meaning in the Nahuatl/Aztec culture. For instance, Mary's hands—one darker in color and thicker than the other—are folded in prayer, symbolizing the union of two races (the Aztec Indians and Spaniards) and the Mestizo people that would come out of this union; Mary herself appeared as a Mestiza. In the image, Mary is pregnant, symbolized by the black girdle, and the Nahuatl Ollin, a four-petaled flower, over her womb indicates the presence of God, thus presenting Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, as the Mother of God. Additionally, Mary introduced herself to Juan Diego using the very title "Mother of God"; she was coming to evangelize, to teach the indigenous Americans about her son.

Through her image and the evangelization efforts of Juan Diego—who was canonized a saint by Pope John Paul II in July 2002—Mary brought three primary messages: unity, respect for life, and evangelization of culture. Through Juan Diego's catechesis, Mary's message progressively reached Diego's native Aztec brothers and sisters, all Latin America countries, all of the Americas, and the entire world. The message was so compelling that, in the several years following Mary's apparitions to St. Juan Diego, over eight million Aztecs were brought to the Faith, even as four million Catholics were leaving the Catholic Church during the early years of the Protestant Reformation in Europe!

## *Atlanta, Georgia: 2007*

Nearly five hundred years later, the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe remains visible in the Basilica of Mexico City, suggesting that her message of 1531 still holds importance for today's world.

In 1531, the three messages of unity, respect for life, and evangelization, spoke to particular aspects of Aztec culture, i.e., the proliferation of gods and a penchant for war, a widespread practice of human sacrifice, and a lack of knowledge of Christ.

We can see the similarities with today's world: disunity among Christian, and even Catholic, peoples, disrespect for the sanctity of life—indeed, a culture of death—and a culture starving for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because of these similarities, Catholics in North Georgia have been invited to focus on Our Lady of Guadalupe's three messages of unity, respect for life, and evangelization in 2007 and beyond. Thus, on December 12, 2007, Archbishop Gregory will crown the Blessed Mother, under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of God and Empress of the Americas, and ask her to unify and protect the increasingly diverse Catholic population in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. At the same time, the Archdiocese will renew its consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the principal patroness of our diocese since its establishment in 1956. North Georgia Catholics in both schools and parishes are asked personally and individually to renew their commitment to her son, Jesus Christ.

In addition to the Crowning and the Renewal of Consecration, the People of God in this local church are asked to undertake or continue three particular devotions: a daily Morning Offering, a daily individual and/or family Rosary, as well as a weekly parish Rosary, and First Friday–First Saturday votive Masses of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Through these three devotions, Mary will lead the People of God in the Archdiocese of Atlanta to a deeper love of and devotion to Christ.

### *Catechesis and Ongoing Formation*

In preparation for the December 12th crowning, Archbishop Gregory brought eleven blessed images of Our Lady of Guadalupe from Mexico City and distributed them among parishes and other organizations at the Eucharist Congress. These images will rotate through clusters of parishes and Catholic schools throughout the diocese.

Each parish, mission, college Catholic center, and Archdiocesan and private Catholic school has been asked to hold catechetical sessions coinciding with the arrival and display of the image at its respective locale.

In order to assist with the planning and implementation of catechetical sessions, the Office of Religious Education has compiled for use in the local parishes and schools a “package” of catechetical resources and materials on Mary generally, on Our Lady of Guadalupe specifically, and on Marian devotion. These materials were compiled for audiences that span the range of ages of faithful in the Archdiocese, from children to adults. Most of the materials are available in both English and Spanish and may be downloaded from our website:

<http://www.archatl.com/offices/dreff/marian>.

Pastors and/or the coordinators named for the project may use these materials—or create their own—in these catechetical sessions.

The Archdiocesan Office of Religious Education is available to assist the parish coordinators with these materials.

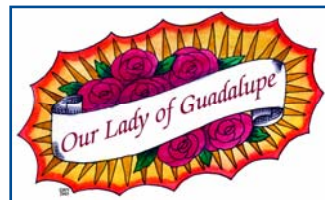
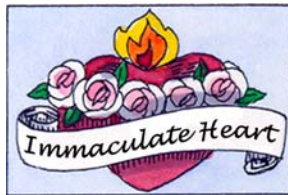
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Immaculate Heart of Mary and Our Lady of Guadalupe... PRAY FOR US!  
Inmaculado Corazón de María y Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe... ¡RUEGA POR NOSOTROS!