

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On the occasion of this Monday, December 12th, being the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I find it fitting that I briefly share with you the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Juan Diego. I have therefore replicated the following story of Our Lady of Guadalupe, as found in the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, pp. 141-143:

St. Juan Diego, a native of Mexico, was born in 1474 and given the name *Cuauhtlatotzin*. At his Baptism, which took place around 1525, he received the Christian name “Juan Diego”. On December 9, 1531, while he was walking to Mass, Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego at Tepeyac Hill, northwest of what is now Mexico City. Her appearance was that of a *mestizo* woman in both features and dress, and she spoke to Juan Diego in his own language. Mary asked “Juanito” to go to the local bishop and request that he build a church on the site of her appearance. The bishop, reluctant to believe Juan Diego, asked for a sign.

Before Juan Diego could return to the hill, he learned that his uncle was dying. Concerned that he would die without the grace of the last Sacraments, Juan Diego hurried to bring a priest to his dying uncle’s bedside. However, Mary met him on his route, told him that his uncle had been cured, and instructed Juan Diego to return to the hill to gather flowers as a sign for the bishop. Though it was out of season, he found **roses**, wrapped them in his cloak, or *tilma*, and returned to the bishop. When Juan Diego unfolded his tilma, the roses fell out, and both he and the bishop were astounded to discover the image of Mary on the cloak looking exactly as Juan Diego had described her.

The tilma that bore Mary’s image soon became an object of veneration. In 1533, a small chapel was built on the site of the apparitions to house the cloak with its miraculous image. Today, just below Tepeyac Hill, stands the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, where the tilma can be seen just as it was seen by the bishop in 1531. The church is a triumph of contemporary architecture incorporating many facets of Mexican culture and spirituality, and it creates a warm, prayerful, and welcoming environment. Pilgrims, on foot or on their knees, often bearing roses, slowly process to the enshrined image. They come to ask favors of the merciful Mother or to give thanks for her tender and compassionate response to their prayers . . . Pilgrims still climb to the top of Tepeyac Hill to visit the original chapel and the site of the apparitions. They can also visit the room where Juan Diego spent his last years in prayer and in propagating the account of the apparitions to his countrymen. Through Mary, under the title of “Our Lady of Guadalupe” and through the evangelizer St. Juan Diego, many of the native peoples of Mexico were converted to Christianity and were baptized into the Church. As a place of pilgrimage, this shrine ranks among the most popular in the world, attracting over ten million pilgrims each year.

Mary appeared at Tepeyac as a young, pregnant woman of indigenous descent. She revealed herself as Mary, the true Mother of God, a merciful mother who listens to the suffering of her people and consoles them all. As her image was imprinted on Juan Diego’s tilma, so **Mary becomes imprinted in the deepest recesses of the hearts of all who come to her**. Under the title of “Our Lady of Guadalupe,” Mary is the patroness of the Americas. There are millions of Catholics in the United States whose devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and regard for St. Juan Diego help keep our faith and commitment to evangelization alive.

Pope John Paul II beatified Juan Diego in 1990. In 2002, the same pope canonized him at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Church celebrates the feast of St. Juan Diego on December 9.

St. Juan Diego is in the company of numerous others who have been privileged with a vision of the Virgin Mary, such as St. Bernadette of Lourdes, France, and the three children, Jacinta, Francisco, and Lucia, of Fatima, Portugal. These visionaries loved the Virgin Mary. Their lives of faith and the gift of God’s graces have drawn millions closer to Christ.

In Christ through Mary,
Mr. Andrew M. Steele