

Joy- Part III: Our Lady of Guadalupe

Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10
Psalm 146
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

Joy is found in the Presence of God. Last week, I preached on how creation can lead us more deeply into the Presence of God, where we experience authentic joy. In addition to God's creation, the Bible teaches that joy can also be found in **remembering the wonderful things God has done for us**—"They shall sing of the ways of the Lord and joyfully celebrate His mighty acts, for great is the glory of the Lord" (Psalm 138:5 *Amplified Bible*). Repeatedly, the authors and characters in Sacred Scripture give us examples of remembering God's works—"I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, your wonders of old I will remember" (Psalm 77:12).

One of the ways that the Church encourages us to remember the wonderful works of God is to offer us special feast days throughout the year. Such days are times when we celebrate God's blessings through people and situations. This weekend is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It gives us an opportunity to "remember the deeds of the LORD" and be filled with gratitude and joy.¹ In order to truly be filled with gratitude and joy, however, we must understand just how elaborate God's love and plan was when He sent the Blessed Virgin Mary to Mexico.

More than three hundred years before she appeared at Lourdes, France² and almost four hundred years before her appearance at Fatima, Portugal,³ the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared in Mexico. Her appearance was preceded by the Spaniards, who arrived in Mexico in 1519 A.D. Upon their arrival, they found a highly developed Aztec civilization. Despite the many cultural advances that the Aztecs had made, they still practiced human sacrifice in order to appease the many gods they worshipped. They considered themselves "people of the sun" and regularly sacrificed humans to the sun god, often thousands in one day and 20,000 annually! Mary's appearance helped to end these slaughters and bring hundreds of thousands of Aztecs to her Son, Jesus Christ.

The first apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary is reported to have taken place in 1531 A.D. at Tepeyac, an area just outside of Mexico City. Mary appeared to a man named Juan Diego, and then to his dying uncle Juan Bernadino.⁴ When Mary appeared to Juan Diego, she asked him to go to the bishop and request that a chapel be built at Tepeyac. When Juan Diego spoke with the bishop, he was dismissed and the bishop told him he would need to bring proof of Mary's desire for a chapel.

Juan Diego returned to the site where Mary had appeared and again she spoke to him and told him to take some roses to the bishop as proof. The roses were Castilian roses and were growing out of the frozen earth. He folded the roses in his *tilma*, which was an apron-like garment made out of woven strips of cactus. Juan returned to the bishop and when he unfolded his *tilma* and the roses fell to the ground, an image was left on his garment. It was an image that would lead hundreds of thousands to Christ!

¹ Gratitude is the "voice" of joy. See Jeremiah 33:11.

² The apparitions at Lourdes took place from Feb. 11, 1858 to July 16, 1858.

³ The apparitions at Fatima, Portugal began on May 13, 1917.

⁴ Juan Bernadino was healed after the apparition.

The miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe shows a woman who is Mestizo—both European and Native American. Some of the most important symbols in the image include:

- ✚ The Sun shining from behind Mary. This showed that Mary and Christ were more important than the sun, which was the main god of the Aztecs.
- ✚ The black maternity band around Mary's waist. The band signified that Mary was pregnant.
- ✚ The jasmine flower in the shape of an Indian cross on Mary's womb. This was an Aztec symbol of something divine, as well as a symbol of the center of the universe. Its placement in the image reveals that Christ is Divine and He is the center of the universe.

In addition to these elaborate details that helped to bring about the conversion of more than nine million Aztecs and put an end to human sacrifices in Mexico, there are numerous scientifically investigated miracles related to the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. These include—

- ✚ Mary's eyes have a series of reflections in them that weren't discovered by science until the dawn of photography hundreds of years after the apparition.
- ✚ The paint that is used in the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is unidentifiable by science.
- ✚ The tilma upon which the image is painted is made out of a plant that should have decomposed several hundred years ago.
- ✚ A bomb was set off underneath the image, and although much of the church was damaged, the painting survived.

When we take time to remember what God did through the apparition and image of Our Lady of Guadalupe our hearts are filled with gratitude and joy! She is the patroness of all the Americas, including the United States of America, and she continues to remind us that Jesus Christ is the center of the universe and that He desires to be the center of our lives.

When we fail to remember the mighty deeds that God has done for us then we sap our lives of joy. Let's spend time this week being mindful of the many ways that God has been at work in our lives, knowing that in remembering such things we enter more deeply into His Presence and His joy!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Spend some time each night this week calling to mind at least five things that you are thankful for that day. Write them in your prayer journal.
- ✚ Recall one wonderful thing that God has done for you that impacted your life. Pay attention to what gets stirred up in your heart as you reflect on that particular memory. Write a letter to God in your prayer journal sharing your thoughts and feelings.