

THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE: **A Culture Changed by a Work of Sacred Art**

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Introduction

The Virgin of Guadalupe, or Our Lady of Guadalupe, is a form of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. But the Virgin of Guadalupe is different from other forms of the Virgin. The Virgin of Guadalupe has black hair and dark skin. It is an indigenous version of the Virgin Mary. It is different from the traditional versions of the Virgin that have white skin and brown hair, European characteristics.

The image of the Virgin appeared inside of the cloak of a poor Mexican that was named Juan Diego. After the apparition, the indigenous people of Latin America accepted the Catholic religion. The result was that the entire culture and civilization of Latin America changed almost instantly.

Today the original cloak and image can be seen in the Basilica of Our lady of Guadalupe, a gigantic church near Mexico City.

The Fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe

The fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe is a big Mexican celebration. It celebrates the apparition of the Virgin. The people celebrate it on the twelfth of December. All over Mexico people go to the churches to sing, give thanks and celebrate. More than five million people go to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe near Mexico City on this special day.

The fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe is not an official celebration of the country of Mexico. It is a religious celebration of the Catholic Church and of the people.



The Virgin of Guadalupe

The Apparition of the Virgin

The Virgin appeared to a poor indigenous man two times: on the ninth of December and on the twelfth of December in 1531. This was ten years after the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish. She did not speak to him in Spanish. She spoke to him in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. The man said that she also did a miracle. This was ten years after the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish.

Juan Diego

The poor indigenous man's name was Juan Diego. It is interesting that the Virgin would appear to a poor indigenous person. She did not appear to a great leader of the church, nor to a king, but to an indigenous person, a humble man. After the appearance of the Virgin, Juan Diego went and told the officials of the Catholic Church about it. They were convinced when they saw another miracle.

The Miracle of The Tilma

A *tilma* is a simple cloak. "The tilma" refers to the tilma of Juan Diego. After seeing the apparition of the Virgin, Juan Diego said that the Virgin had done a miracle for him. She gave him some roses that are not seen in Mexico. Juan Diego put them in his tilma and went to talk to the leaders of the church. When Juan Diego arrived at the church, he opened his tilma. The roses fell out, but then everyone saw another miracle. Inside of Juan Diego's tilma there was an image of the Virgin. You can still see that same tilma today in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Afterwards, the Catholic Church verified that Juan Diego's story was the truth, and the tilma was part of the evidence. The tilma is still in the Basilica near Mexico City. The image on the tilma is the same image of the Virgin that is seen all over Mexico today.

The Virgin in Latin America

For the indigenous people, the Virgin of Guadalupe meant that God loved them and that being part of the Catholic religion would be good for them.

The Virgin told Juan Diego that she wanted the name Guadalupe, a Spanish name, so the Virgin of Guadalupe represents the unification of the indigenous culture with the Catholic Church.

After the Apparition

Before the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe there were few indigenous Catholics. The indigenous people did not want to accept the new religion of the Spanish conquerors. They did not want to be part of the Catholic Church. Only five hundred indigenous people were baptized in the ten years between the conquest of Mexico in 1521 and the year when the Virgin appeared in the year 1531.

After the apparition, everything changed. The legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe convinced the native peoples that God had accepted them. The indigenous people were able to see the mother of God in a form similar to them, with dark skin. She was different than the Spanish conquerors, which had white skin.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patron saint of the Americas because the culture of the Americas changed so much after the apparition. The majority of the people in all of the countries of Latin America accepted the Catholic religion. Most of the people of Latin America are still Catholic today.

The Image of the Virgin of Guadalupe

The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was considered to be a miracle by the indigenous peoples of Latin America for many reasons:

1) **The Image Today.** You can still see the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the original *tilma* of Juan Diego in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe today. After almost five hundred years the image is still intact. The colors are still vibrant. No one can explain why.

2) **The Parts of the Image.** There are many details in the image of the Virgin that were precious to the native peoples:

a) She was one of them:

- She had dark skin and hair.
- She wears an Aztec belt, which indicates that she is a native and also a virgin.

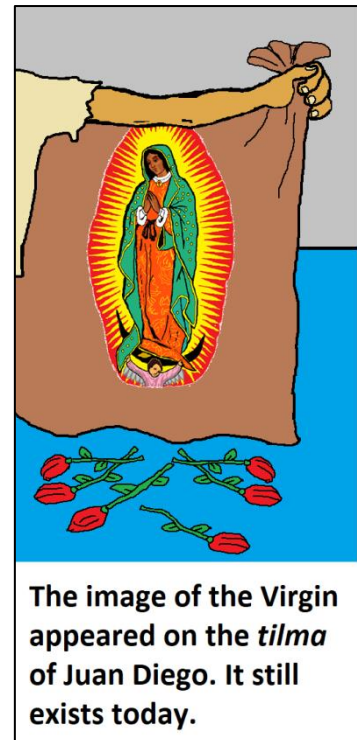
b) She was more important and more powerful than the gods of the Aztecs because:

- She is standing on the moon, one of the gods of the Aztecs, so she is greater than the moon.
- She is in front of the sun, another Aztec god, so she is greater than the sun.
- She wears the heavens and all of the stars as a cloak, so she is greater than the heavens.

c) Other aspects of her appearance are meaningful

- She is wearing white bracelets, Aztec symbols for a pregnant woman
- She was very pregnant, obviously close to giving birth

All of the details in the image signified to the indigenous people that her baby was more important than the rest of the gods. The woman on the *tilma* was the mother of the son of God, that is, the mother of Jesus Christ. She also wears a cross on her chest, a Christian symbol.



The Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexican Culture

Nowadays the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is an important symbol of the Mexican people. There are drawings of the Virgin everywhere. The Virgin can be seen on T-shirts and ball caps, on tattoos and murals, and in almost every Mexican home. The twelfth of December, the Day of our Lady of Guadalupe, is an important holiday for the people of Mexico.

Carlos Fuentes, the famous Mexican author, said: **“You can’t really be considered a Mexican unless you believe in the Virgin of Guadalupe.”** (<http://www.buenastareas.com/ensayos/La-Virgen-Guadalupe/2159244.html>)

The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe

The Basilica of our Lady of Guadalupe is a very large church north of Mexico City. The original basilica was built in the year 1709 on the site where the Virgin of Guadalupe visited Juan Diego in the year 1531. The new basilica is much larger and it was built in the year 1976. The Virgin of Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexico and of all the Americas. Her image is an important symbol of Mexican culture, so the basilica is very important for all of the Catholics in Latin America. More than twenty million people visit the basilica every year. If it were a tourist location, it would be one of the most visited tourist spots in the world. But it is much more than a tourist location for Mexican Catholics: It is the place where the mother of God visited one of them.



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