



Every culture, from the most primitive hunter-gatherers to the most sophisticated societies, have land that they consider sacred. Holy places charged with a divine energy. These sites remain important locations in the history of religion and they continue to inspire spiritual feelings.

I wanted to know “why”? Why do certain places become sacred sites, and others don’t? What were they before? Why do millions of people visit them each year? I started out as a journalist researching a story, and I ended up as a pilgrim.

MEXICO CITY

People have been living in Mexico for over 20,000 years. The ancient people of the region ... the Olmecs, the Maya, and the Aztecs developed some of the most sophisticated cultures in history. When the Spanish conquistadors arrived in 1519, the Aztecs controlled most of what we now call Mexico.

And the center of their civilization was what we now call Mexico City. Today, Mexico City is one of the largest and most populated cities in the world. . . twenty million people live and work in a maze of Indian, Spanish, French and modern buildings. It is the nation’s center for politics, business, culture and religion.

Mexico City has been called a city of miracles and for good reason. Twenty million people live in a valley that is over 7,000 feet above sea level. It was built on top of an ancient Aztec capital, which was built on top of a lake, so the whole place is slowly sinking. Each year, thousands of new residents arrive, increasing the stress on every aspect of life in the city.

And yet, Mexico City has some of the world’s most interesting museums, excavations of ancient temples, extraordinary Baroque churches, colonial palaces, magnificent parks, and great restaurants.

The fact that Mexico City functions as well as it does is a miracle, a complex urban miracle but nevertheless a miracle. Mexico City is also a center for religious miracles, miracles that date back for hundreds of years.

From the moment the Spanish came ashore they began converting the natives to Catholicism. Today ninety percent of

Mexicans are Roman Catholic. The Church plays an important part in Mexican life, and the country is filled with religious sites.

The most important religious site in Mexico is the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It sits on a hill about six miles from the center of Mexico City and each year millions of people visit the site. Some are pilgrims looking for salvation, some are people asking for help for themselves or someone they love, and some are people who are coming just to see what happens here, because they’re curious.

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

When Christopher Columbus arrived in the New World there were no Christian saints to meet him—no Christian relics were carried to his ship to celebrate the success of his voyage. As a matter of fact, there weren’t any Christians at all.

During the 16th century, thousands of Christians began to show up in the New World, but the place was still pretty short on certified saints and relics. During the middle of the century, however, things began to change, miraculous images began to appear — and most often they were images of Jesus or the Virgin Mary.

Our Lady of Guadalupe on the hill at Tepeyac, at the edge of Mexico City, was the first apparition of Mary in the New World that was officially recognized by the Catholic Church. She is the patron saint of Mexico and all Hispanic nations in America, as well as the patron saint of Canada and the United States.

Today, the shrine attracts almost 20 million pilgrims each year. Of all the sacred places in the entire world dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe is the most popular.

Eventually she became the national symbol of Mexico and her story is an essential part of the history and culture of the nation. Her image is found throughout the country

In 1737, Guadalupe was chosen as the patroness of the city of Mexico. But her significance was not confined to Mexico. Her patronage was soon extended to all of New Spain, then to Guatemala and finally to all Spanish colonies throughout the world.



Our Lady of Guadalupe is venerated throughout the Americas, but the events that take place each year on her feast day, December 12th, here in Mexico City, are remarkable. During a three-day period over five million people make a pilgrimage to this hill. They come to pray for help for themselves or for someone they love. They come on their knees, from miles away, to show their devotion. Young, old, sick, well, they all arrive asking for Our Lady of Guadalupe to enter their lives.

THE STORY OF JUAN DIEGO

The devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe is based on the story of Juan Diego. This is the story as told by Rev. Stafford Poole, C.M., author of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*:

The story is set in the year 1531, which was just ten years after the Spanish conquest of Mexico.

Juan Diego was an Indian, a newly converted Indian who, in 1531, had a vision of the Virgin Mary at a place north of Mexico City called Tepeyac. It was a mountain. He was walking by there one



Saturday on his way to receive religious instruction when he heard his name called and together with it these beautiful heavenly sounds, the sounds of birds singing, of sublime music; and a voice called him to go up this hill of Tepeyac; and there he saw this splendid vision of the Virgin Mary who identified herself as the Mother of God. And she told him that she wanted him to go to the Bishop of Mexico, a Franciscan friar

named Juan de Samarruga. She told him that she wanted a church built on that particular site, and there, all of her people could come, and she would hear their pleas, their prayers, their entreaties, and their sorrows.

So Juan Diego went to the Bishop who received him kindly but initially was skeptical. So Juan Diego went back to Tepeyac, and informed the Virgin of what happened. He told her about the Bishop's request for a sign.

She told him to go up the hill and to gather all the flowers that he would see there. It was December at a time when there was nothing there but frost and cactus and rocks and mesquite, but he found all kinds of flowers which he cut and put into his cloak, which in the Aztec language was called a Tilma.

Juan Diego took the flowers back to the Virgin, gave them to her, she blessed them, and then he went back to Mexico City to present them to the Bishop.

He opened up the cloak; the flowers cascaded to the floor. And imprinted on the cloak was the image which is venerated today at Guadalupe.

Some historians see the story as an essential element connecting the Indian past to the Spanish future. The Virgin Mary appears to a lowly Indian at the hill at Tepeyac, which had once been the sacred home of a pre-Columbian mother

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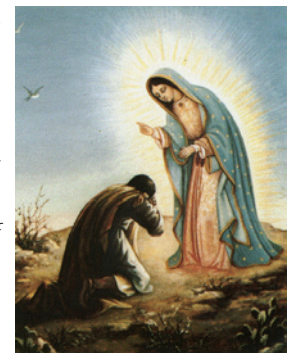
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goddess. Indians came to the site of the miracle and accepted her as the incarnation of the Aztec goddess of life, health and happiness.

To the Indians, Our Lady of Guadalupe became the new image of their mother who could restore order to their devastated world. She was able to bring continuity to their lives—connecting the past to the present and the future.

Dr. William Taylor at the University of California has been studying Our Lady of Guadalupe and what she has come to represent to different people.

She has always meant many things to many Mexicans. She wasn't just the Indian Virgin, she wasn't just the Mestizo Virgin, and she wasn't just the Spanish Virgin. She's appealed to all of these groups and over a very long period of time. Today, she has a remarkable appeal for any number of people in this country, especially Mexicans who have come to this country. Not only Mexicans, though, New Age questors are interested in Guadalupe; Protestant theologians are interested in Guadalupe. But above all, she has an appeal to Mexican-Americans, who think of her in many different ways. Think of her perhaps as the Mestizo Virgin. A symbol of patriotism. A symbol of their ethnic solidarity. A symbol of home here in the United States. She comes with them. She never leaves. She has the appeal of independence to Chicana feminists. She can be a symbol of resistance...



But she has equal appeal to an older woman in East Los Angeles who came here 50 years ago, has a home altar with a print of Our Lady of Guadalupe. There, she's a symbol of consolation, of a kind of presence, a kind of healing power that's very important to her.

THE NATIONAL SHRINE WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mexico City may be the world's epicenter for the festivities surrounding Our Lady of Guadalupe on her feast day, but The



National Shrine in Washington D.C. is a close second.

The largest Catholic Church in the Western Hemisphere and one of the largest in the world is the Basilica of The

National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception here in Washington, D.C. It stands as a tribute to the Virgin Mary. The Shrine's architects chose a Byzantine-Romanesque design in order to reflect the traditions of church art and architecture. The cornerstone was laid in 1920 and the Great Upper Church was completed and dedicated in 1959. Each year over seven hundred and fifty thousand people visit this magnificent sanctuary. Dominating the North Apse of the Great Upper

Church is an enormous mosaic of "Christ in Majesty." It contains over three million tiles and is the largest mosaic of Christ in the world. It portrays Him as celestial ruler.

Other large mosaics illustrate the creation of the world. The Basilica honors The Virgin Mary under her title of the Immaculate Conception. The sacred art is also designed to show that the United States is an ethnic melting pot.

Reverend Monsignor Michael J. Bransfield is the Rector of the Basilica.

After Christ, the greatest saint in the history of the church is his Blessed Mother

The devotion to Mary goes back a millennium and to the early Church. She goes across cultures, she goes across nationalities, she penetrates the whole Catholic culture.

People are looking to her to cure them from their illnesses, to understand the suffering they're going through, because she has the image of the mother, the protector and healer.

Today, Our Lady of Guadalupe is the most popular chapel. There are always flowers being brought in by somebody. It's really a lively place of devotion. It was always a beautiful chapel, but it's much more beautiful with people in it, as is true of any chapel.



The building contains more than sixty chapels and oratories that reflect the religious heritage brought to America by generations of Catholic immigrants. Each year hundreds of Hispanic residents of the Washington D.C. area march to The National Shrine and attend a special mass dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

THE TILMA TOUR

Because the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe was impressed on a cloak (Tilma) that was made of a coarse and easily damaged fabric, and subjected to years of handling, it was eventually placed in a protective shrine.



If you want to see the Tilma of Our Lady of Guadalupe you must go to Tepeyac, it no longer travels. One result of the Tilma's continuing residence in one place has been a growing interest in copies of the image.

And the more exact the copy, the more it was thought to invite the assistance of the "real" Mary. In fact, several precise copies became pilgrimage sites on their own. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the cloak is filled with elements that speak to

both the native population of Mexico as well as those of Spanish descent.

Arturo Rocha Cortes is an expert on the subject.

What we have here is a collection of symbols which were as meaningful to the Spaniards as they were to the native Indians.

TO LEARN MORE . . .

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WHERE TO STAY

While I was in Mexico City, I stayed at the Four Seasons, which is an oasis of quiet and seclusion. You enter into a marble lined lobby that feels like a Spanish colonial mansion. And the staff treats you like you were a colonial governor, a colonial governor before the revolution...that's an important point.

One reason for the peacefulness is the architecture of the building. The structure wraps around a cloistered courtyard that is filled with flowers and a central fountain. At one corner of the courtyard is the hotel's bar, which has the feeling of a library in London. Next to the bar is the hotel's restaurant, which is called Reforma 500. Reforma has a general menu based on the classic dishes of the Mediterranean. But it also has a tasting menu with dishes that go back to the foods of Mexico before the Spanish arrived.

The hotel can take you on a gastronomic tour, but it also specializes in cultural tours. They have a hotel historian that will accompany guests on special tours of the city's cultural attractions. Each runs for about five hours.



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Our Lady of Guadalupe's appearance was important for both groups.

The first element we see is her face. It is a mixed face of Spanish and Indian. A union between the two groups which had previously been separated by a wall of hate and misunderstanding.

To an Indian in the 1550s, there were many interesting elements. The Spanish saw a flower, but the Indians saw the symbol of the mountain of Tepeyac. In the language of the Aztecs, Tepeyac means nose or mountain's peak and if we look closer you can see the shape. It is a mountain with a nose. The Indians believed that the river of life came from this mountain. Our Lady of Guadalupe is also a source of life. A black ribbon was the Indian sign of a pregnant woman.



The Spanish saw Our Lady's feet on an Angel or a Cherub, but the Indians saw a deity they recognized as part of their ancient religion. The Angel is a symbol of the union between the two religions. The Spanish saw Our Lady embracing the sun, a symbol of Jesus. But the natives saw a symbol from their calendar, which promised great change. Our Lady was bringing the Indians the message of Jesus.

More than anything else the picture of Our Lady is the blending together of Spanish and Aztec images.

The importance of those copies has continued, and during

2003 and 2004 a piece of the actual Tilma traveled throughout the United States. The piece of cloth from the cloak is small, only an inch square. But size is not the issue. This is about power. And for the faithful, any single piece of the cloak contains all the power of the image. A power that arrives from a supernatural place. The Tilma Tour was made possible through the efforts of The Knights of Columbus, an organization I heard about but never really knew what they did.

THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

Most of the immigrants who came to the United States during the 1800s were single men. But when the Irish potato crop failed in 1845 and hundreds of thousands of Irish men and woman fled to America many came as families. And of the others who did not come as families, there were almost the same number of men as women, which allowed for the immediate formation of more families. The Irish American community developed a strong identity from the moment they came ashore.

Patrick and Mary McGivney were typical of the Irish families that arrived during the mid-1800's. Patrick landed with very few skills and with almost no money, but like most of his fellow immigrants he showed up with the need and the willingness



to work. The great infrastructure that allowed the American economy to dominate the 20th century—the railroads, the canals, amazing works like the Brooklyn Bridge, were all built with major contributions from Irish workers.

The McGivneys settled in Waterbury Connecticut and Pat became a molder in a nearby brass mill. The McGivney's were not faced with the prospect of starvation which haunted them in Ireland but they did live in the grip of poverty. Their oldest child Michael grew up in a community filled with the sorrow that comes along with scarcity.

When Michael was thirteen years old he went to work in a spoon-making factory so he could contribute a few dollars towards the family's survival. At sixteen he left the mill and began his studies for the priesthood. On Christmas Day, 1877, Father McGivney began his ministry as Curate of St. Mary's Church in New Haven, Connecticut.



It was a time when parish clubs were popular. For the most part, they were social organizations that gave the Irish community a chance to hangout. But Father McGivney saw them as an opportunity to build a fund that would provide for the financial needs of families that were overwhelmed by illness or death.

Father McGivney began working with a group of Civil War Veterans that had come to the United States from Ireland. They wanted to form an organization that would help protect their families during times of stress and they called their group The Knights of Columbus. They wanted to make the point that they themselves were still struggling for equality in our own country, but they were now in the new world.

Today, The Knights of Columbus combine fraternalism and an insurance program that meets Father McGivney's vision of support for families in trouble. There are one million seven hundred thousand Knights and during the past ten years they have contributed over one billion dollars and four hundred million hours of volunteer service to charitable causes.

The head of the Knights of Columbus is Carl Anderson.

We're doing a lot. We've raised about 128 million dollars for charity, volunteer about 60 million hours a year. And we've got hundreds of different projects at the local level, helping the handicapped, helping children, working in schools and communities. We want to get people opening their hearts more to charity and get men involved in doing very practical things that they can do to help people in their community.

By the end of the First World War, we had over 200 facilities for the servicemen in the United States, in the western and eastern fronts in Europe. And our slogan was, "everyone welcome, everything free." We thought we should be help those guys when they were serving the country. But also, make a statement about religious tolerance, and the fact that really we're one country and we can serve together

and actually enjoy things together as well.

THE GOOD NEWS

Roman Catholicism is the oldest Church in Christianity. It spreads the word that God came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ who spent his life teaching people how to behave in order to attain salvation and everlasting life.

The first people to spread the Gospel, about two thousand years ago, were simple men and women, who had somehow found a way to live a peaceful and happy life. They didn't care about social structure or wealth. They believed that God saw everybody as equal, and loved them that way, and that's the way they lived.

It was the message that the early Christians needed to hear, and 1500 years later, just the "good news" that both the Spanish, who were born in the New World, and Native Indians, wanted to hear.

One of the nice things about divine intervention is it can do more than one thing at a time. When Our Lady of Guadalupe first showed up, she confirmed her desire to protect and heal the native-born population of the New World... individually, one person at a time. But she also gave the entire Native American community a sense of self worth and importance. The proper way to honor her gifts was to build a basilica which represented the total population but was also a place where individual miracles could take place.



THE HILL OF TEPEYAC

For over 300 years, the faithful have been constructing churches on the hill of Tepeyac. Padre Gustavo Watson is an expert on the hill's history.



At the very top of the hill is the Old Basilica. It is on the spot where the first three apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe took place. During the 1600s a small church was put up to commemorate the site. And during the 1700s this great temple was built.

Just down the hill is one of the great examples of Mexican Baroque architecture. It was built in 1791 with an unusual plan around an ancient spring. The well's waters were thought to have curative powers. The water has dried up but not the people's love of the small church.

The Antigua Basilica was construction in 1695 and it soon became the most important place of devotion in New Spain. When a Viceroy was sent from Europe to take control of Spain's possessions in the New World, this was the spot where he took power.

THE NEW BASILICA

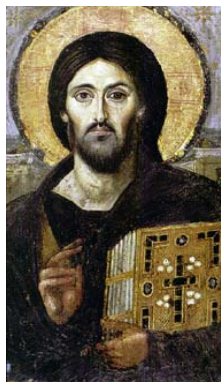
Like many old buildings in and around Mexico City the foundation of the Old Basilica is slowly sinking. When it became dangerous a new basilica was built nearby. It was completed in 1976 and can hold over 10,000 people. It's the most visited Catholic sanctuary in the World. It stands in the form of a tent, a reference to the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament. A circular plan allows the image of the Virgin to be seen from any point in the building.



A slow-moving pedestrian walkway carries you past the Virgin. The architects knew that every day thousands of people would want to stand in front of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and if they didn't find a way of moving the people along they'd be in big trouble. Services take place throughout the day, but tourists also wander in and out of the building to view the architecture and the image.

HONORING THE IMAGE

There is a passage in the Bible that says: I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. And thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images. The Old Testament is pretty clear on the subject: man-made images are off limits. Don't make any pictures. Don't make any sculptures. If you've got something to say, say it directly. But during the sixth century things began to change. The Christian Church started to accept praying to pictures.



Rev. Stafford Poole, C.M.

Author of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*:

It was the separation of Christianity from Judaism. And in the process, Christianity either dropped or rejected many Judaic practices. This starts with St. Paul. And the first one that was not imposed upon Christian converts was circumcision. Then, sometime in the first century, they changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. They gave up the idea of ritual purification, or ritual and cleanness. They stopped observing the dietary laws. Christians eat pork, Jews didn't. So it was all part of a divergence, and the use of images was just one part.

People began to promote the idea that when you prayed to a picture, your prayer passed through the picture and reached the model. Pope Gregory loved the idea and added the thought that "the picture is for the simple man what writing is for those who can read."

It was clear that the souls of the great martyrs were in heaven, but their remains on earth were filled with extraordinary powers. They could protect worshipers from the devil and heal

the sick. Some relics were powerful enough to protect an entire city. Thousands of pilgrims would visit the sacred sites where these relics were kept. And the miracles that took place were carefully documented.

HOLY WEEK

In order to understand the religious environment of New Spain, it's helpful to take a look at what was happening in Old Spain, particularly in the city of Seville. It was from Seville that Christopher Columbus set sail, and it was right back to Seville that he returned with his treasures. For decades, the city had a monopoly on the commercial and religious activity that took place between Europe and the new world.



To understand the church in Seville it helps to understand Holy week, which is a symbolic conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil. During the 1300's, the people of Seville began to group themselves into brotherhoods. Each brotherhood agreed to produce an image from the passion of Christ or a sorrowing Virgin, and to honor that image throughout the year. The members who actually walk in the procession wear long robes in the colors of the brotherhood. The pointed headgear, which looks rather terrifying, was originally designed to hide the identity of the person inside. There's a theory that being disguised in this costume gave men the opportunity to get in touch with their feelings and their love of God. Showing religious emotion in public was not easy in a culture that has often seen religious behavior as not "macho." Under the hood, your emotions remain private. Some of the members have taken the cones out of their hoods. They want the peak to hang down, to look humble. These are people doing penance. The visual symbol is like that of the cock that has become crestfallen, and is therefore no longer cocky.

Today, a brotherhood might have up to 3000 members, including both men and women. Each brotherhood owns from one to three floats with scenes showing Christ's passion or the weeping Virgin. Each float weighs two to three tons, and is carried through the streets of Seville by groups of young men. For years the floats were carried by professional stevedores. Eventually, the fees of the stevedores became too expensive for the brotherhoods. People thought that carrying the floats through the streets of Seville would come to an end.



But the young men of each brotherhood came through and the general opinion is that the young men do a better job than the stevedores did. There is a considerable art to carrying the floats - the

objective is to make the figures sway so they seem alive and moving.

As the Passion of Christ is played out along the streets of the city, Seville becomes Jerusalem. It's an ancient way for a festival



to teach a story. The town where the festival is going on is turned into the town where the original events took place.

The floats that pass through the streets of Seville express suffering and pain in two different forms. There are the images of Christ - images of direct physical pain - and there are the images of the weeping Madonnas: images of the pain of looking on, knowing that you are helpless to prevent the suffering of someone you love. The Madonna's pain is the pain of the parent.

There are magic moments during the festival that are called *Saetas*, which is the Spanish word for arrow. In this case it is an arrow of emotion, of passion, of sentiment, and it passes between one of the statues being carried through the streets and one of the people watching the procession. The viewer has been overwhelmed with feeling for Christ or the Virgin Mary, and she expresses herself by singing the story of her love and her sadness.

Writing and singing *Saetas* is an art form, and one of the most amazing aspects of the entire celebration. But they are also very personal moments. Often it is only the singer who knows when and where a *Saeta* will take place. And sometimes, a singer only finds out because he or she is suddenly singing.

The processions go on day and night for seven days. Each float must pass through a series of streets, and every float must stop at the cathedral. This public commitment to Christ, this show of love, is a central part of the church of Seville, and it became an essential aspect of the church of Mexico.

GOING FOR BAROQUE

During the middle of the 1500s the Roman Catholic Church decided to introduce a new form of religious architecture designed to oppose the almost barren approach of the reformation. The new style came to be known as Baroque. It was adopted throughout Spain and soon began appearing throughout Mexico. It was rich, grand sensuous and dramatic. Its object was to evoke an emotional response. In essence, it said this was the appropriate level of splendor for the Lord. It was a way to extend and encourage the public's faith in the Church. The ceilings of Baroque churches are always painted with vivid images of the divine world above. They invite the viewer to contemplate the rewards of heaven.

But the Baroque was not limited to art and architecture it also became one of the greatest periods in classical music...Bach, Handel and Vivaldi were all masters of the



Baroque.

CHRISTIAN TRADITION

In almost every religion there were men and women who were able to make contact with the spirit world and use the power of that unseen place to work wonders in our world. When the bible says, "The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me," it is a reference to the unseen universe. It is also a reference to the idea that our well-being is the result of having a proper relationship with that spiritual world.

Jesus was in the tradition of men who stood between our world and the spiritual world and used the power of the spiritual to influence events. These men and women were always dramatic personalities and dynamic speakers and they always attracted lots of attention. One of the major differences between Jesus and the mediators that preceded him was that instead of just using his power to heal individual people Jesus set out to heal the entire world.



Jesus asked his listeners to believe in his message not because he said it was true, or because the message came from God, but because if they looked in their own hearts they would feel the truth of his words. And His message was very simple: God's love is unyielding; we need to accept it and we need to let it pass through us to others. Love is the ultimate power.

Jesus taught that everyone was equal in the eyes of God - and that the poor were as important as the rich. He opposed the corruption of the ruling class, and that challenged the status quo, and so they had him executed. Details around the crucifixion and the days after are somewhat limited but what is clear is that his followers felt his presence more than ever. They had experienced his resurrection, and that produced the Christian Church, which swept across the Roman world.

THE TWO FOODS OF GUADALUPE

In 1895, the Mexican government acknowledged the importance of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a national symbol by formally crowning her as the patron saint of Mexico.

About a year later, Vincenta Torres de Rubino, the first woman to put together a Mexican cookbook, paid tribute to the Virgin of Guadalupe, by publishing a recipe for a small corn-based griddlecake called a *gordita*. It was a local recipe in the town of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which is the town next to the shrine. *Gorditas* are an example of how a local dish is transformed into a national symbol. For over a hundred years some of the residents of Guadalupe Hidalgo have earned a living by selling *gorditas* to pilgrims.

On December 12th, which is Our Lady of Guadalupe's Feast Day, people who live in the neighborhood roast a goat, and serve it with a sauce they call drunken sauce. It's made from

garlic, oil, hot peppers, beer, sherry, and tequila. It's the only sauce I know that requires a designated driver.

THE MYSTERY OF OUR LADY'S EYES

In 1979, Dr. Jose Aste Tonsmann, a graduate of Cornell University, while working at IBM, scanned a photo of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and filtered the image in order to produce the highest quality picture. When he did so, he discovered that there were other people reflected in her eyes... in fact an entire family, as they would have appeared in the 1500s.

Tonsmann concluded that the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe contains any number of messages and each will be revealed at the appropriate moment in history. He feels that the modern technology needed to see the family reflects the reality that these days more than ever the idea of family is being challenged. Her eyes remind us of our present need to address this problem.

Not everybody agrees that there are images in the eyes of Our Lady of Guadalupe. One noted authority told me that in order to see those images you needed computer enhancement and a great imagination. Well, fortunately we have computer enhancement and if Jesus could imagine a world filled with love and peace, I'm all for imagination.

SCIENCE BEHIND THE HEALING

There are thousands of people who believe they have been cured by Our Lady of Guadalupe and it would be easy to write off their stories as unscientific fantasy. But in fact, there is a considerable amount of medical evidence to indicate that these miraculous recoveries take place.

Over thirty years ago, Dr. Herbert Benson, an associate professor at Harvard Medical School, took a group of researchers to Tibet so they could study the relationship of spiritual beliefs to mind-body control. The ultimate question: could your mind heal your body?

Dr. Benson:

I'm a cardiologist by training, and early in my career, I noticed that people were coming to me and I was finding disproportionately high blood pressures. I wondered what was going on. I was consistently overmedicating them. So I went back to Harvard Medical School, from which I had recently graduated, to see whether or not I couldn't set up an animal model for stress-induced high blood pressure. We were successful. And then some young people came to me and said, "Why are you fooling around with monkeys?" Please, investigate us."

And we found that when a person meditated, repeating his or her focus, there was decreased metabolism, decreased heart rate, decreased rate of breathing, a quietude in the muscles. They were less tense.

Then we searched to see whether or not these two steps hadn't been described before. Every single human culture that had a written history had these two steps within them. The first is a

repetition, and that repetition can be a prayer. The other is a disregard of other thoughts when they come to mind. That repetition of a prayer of course involves belief.

People choose a word, often a prayer that they believe in. And that belief is religious. And you're hooking right in to the power of belief. And people will believe that it's not only my inherent healing powers, but God-given healing powers that will bring about my healing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

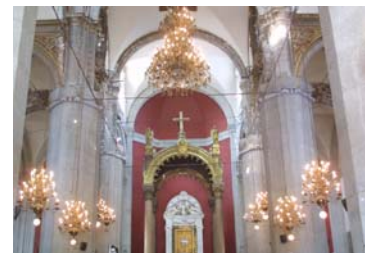
Are there gaps in the history of Our Virgin of Guadalupe? Do twenty-first century scientists question certain aspects of the story? Of course, it's the job of historical scholars to question everything. However, it's also essential to remember the importance of tradition. Often a tradition will have a life of its own and will not be easily subjected to scientific study. But having a vision of the Holy has been essential to human history.

It was the vision of the Holy that produced many of our greatest masterpieces of art and music. And it is a vision of the Holy that motivates the faithful to risk everything to relieve the world's suffering; to care for plague victims; to defend the rights of children; to go into war zones to feed the poor.

History seems to tell us that the people who did most for us in this world were the people who thought the most about the next world, and when we lose sight of the next world, we become ineffective in this one.

Experts on Mexican history and culture have said that their nation was born at Tepeyac with the appearance of the Virgin Mary. And that's because in addition to her religious significance, she is the symbol of Mexican culture.

In 1810, Miguel Hidalgo, a parish priest urged the rural population to rebel against Spain. He gave them a copy of the Virgin of Guadalupe from Tepeyac and told them that their battle cry should be "Long Live Our Lady of Guadalupe." Once Mexico



won its independence, Guadalupe became the symbol of the new nation. She represented not only the Spanish born in Mexico and the native Indians but everyone associated with the country.

Octavio Paz, Mexico's Nobel prize-winning poet once said that, after two centuries of experimentation, the people of Mexico have come to believe in only two things, Our Lady of Guadalupe and the National Lottery.

Tepeyac is a sacred place and has been so for centuries. If you believe in a life beyond the one you are living now, then this place is a natural home for you. But no matter what you accept as true, a visit to Tepeyac will remind you of the importance of faith. Someone once said to me, you can think *about* a sacred place or you can think *with* it.