

## ***Our Lady of Guadalupe: Source of Hope for the New Evangelization***

Homiletic Message in Honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe 2012 for the Diocese of Yakima

*Revelation 11:19a, 12:1-6a, 10ab, Luke 1:26-38*

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Peace be with you! “A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and her head a crown of twelve stars.” Those words from the opening reading in the Book of Revelation are generally selected for this liturgical celebration in honor of our Lady of Guadalupe because they align so tightly with the image of our Lady that appeared on San Juan Diego’s “Tilma.”

In this “Year of Faith” we might also uplift the words spoken by our Lady to San Juan Diego as well: “I am your most merciful Mother ... I want to show my loving clemency and compassion to those who call upon me in their sorrows.” These words and this image shared with simple San Juan Diego at Tepeyac, Mexico in 1531 represents the first and most singular Marian apparition in the “New World” of the Americas and – as such – this simple message of love represented the first Evangelization of the Americas.

Chicago priest and seminary rector Father Robert Barron in his video series on Catholicism notes that as a direct result of this simple message of love, 10,000 people per day for ten years were converted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As such, this devotion to our Lady of Guadalupe represented the single largest religious conversion in history. Imagine 10,000 people per day for ten years! Even today, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe is the most visited religious shrine in the world!

What sparked such a massive conversion? What catalyzes us – even today – to pay such careful attention to the message of Our Lady of Guadalupe? Historically speaking, Christian anthropologist Gil Baile in his book “Violence Unveiled” notes that in many pre-Christian societies, social harmony and social order were created by sacrificial violence. In the case of the ancient Aztecs, current research seems to indicate that one-fifth of all children were “religiously” sacrificed to the gods. And we have all seen movies depicting the human sacrifices where a beating heart would be pulled out of a victim and displayed before roaring crowds.

What Gil Baile points out is that people of ancient civilizations were so transfixed by the blood sacrifice that they became distracted by their individual competitiveness and rivalries and thus – at least for a time – social harmony and social order were restored as a result of the “sacrificial” and bloody death of the victim.

What makes the death of Jesus on a cross so unique is the simple fact that for the first time people realize their sacrificial victim is innocent. Jesus died – not because he was a criminal –but because he was all good. Jesus died – not because he did any wrong – but because the crowd, primed for blood lust, needed a “scapegoat,” a sacrificial victim upon whom to dump their rivalries, their competitiveness, their blood lust and their violence. Note that in the Passion narratives of Jesus it is the Roman centurion – a gentile – who confesses that fact that “Indeed this was an innocent man.”

As I have often told youth, Jesus dies in a bloody big-screen production so you don't have to live in one. The problem, then, is not that the sacrificial death of Jesus – once for all – was less that effective. No! The problem is that we walk around today like the death of Jesus never happened! We continue with our blood sport, our sexual immorality and our violence. We may think ourselves above the ancient Aztecs and their bloody sacrifice of children but we think nothing of the scourge of millions being aborted on an annual basis. We think ourselves better than those who have gone before us, but we sacrifice millions – especially children – to poverty and starvation through inattention and a hardness of hearts. How often have we turned a blind eye to gang violence and truancy in our own town or neighborhood?

Yes, sometimes our blood sacrifices are indeed very bloody and very physical but sometimes it's very subtle as when we knife another person through gossip, be that among co-workers or – sad to say – among family, friends and fellow parishioners. How easy it is to “sacrifice” the good name of someone! To talk about them behind their back! To say misleading things or even total falsehoods! Those around us – those closest to us – are often the easiest targets of this kind of blood sacrifice because we know them the best and the comment or gossip can thus cut the deepest. We might want to ask ourselves, do we rewrite the events in other people's lives as if they were scripts from a soap opera? And is our personal behavior straight out of a “soap opera” where we sacrifice fidelity in marriage and purity in our singleness on the altar of personal pleasure?

If we find ourselves feeling a little uneasy, that's OK, because that uneasiness might stir us to reconsider the message given to San Juan Diego by Our Lady of Guadalupe and better prepare our hearts to receive Christ this Christmas. The fact is that we are all the children of Our Lady of Guadalupe – the very best humanity has to offer – but we need to act like it and we need to witness to this reality in our daily lives. We need to ask her support and her protection because we know all alone on our very own we cannot possibly follow the great path of holiness marked by God in the very person of Jesus without the help of his mother leading the way. Because she leads the way, Our Lady of Guadalupe is not only the mother of Jesus – she is our mother too.

Perhaps this is why it might be wise to remember that our Holy Father, Pope Benedict the XVI has declared this “Year of Faith” in order to launch the “New Evangelization.” That “New Evangelization” is not a new Gospel or a new message. Quite the opposite! The “New Evangelization” is meant for all of us who have once heard the message but allowed it to grow stale, lukewarm and inactive in our thoughts, words and deeds.

We need to allow that message of Mary's “loving clemency” – in her own words to San Juan Diego – to grow and take root in our interior loves. The message of Tepeyac is quite simple. God loves you! God sent you Jesus as a sign of that love. God animates this mutual love of Father and Son through the Holy Spirit alive and active in our Church. As such the Church loves you. Your pastor loves you! As bishop I love you! But I can only say those words in this American context because that love has been modeled by “Our Lady of Guadalupe!” The same is true for each of you! Rely on “Our Lady of Guadalupe” to help you love better! Ask her to guide you more deeply to Jesus! Walk with her as she follows Jesus! Stay faithful to the message of Tepeyac which is a message of love that I propose for each and every one of you as your bishop on this beautiful feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe! Peace be with you!