

DEDICATION WEEK OF THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE  
GALA DINNER  
JULY 30, 2008

**REMARKS**

1. My heartfelt thanks to all of you for joining into tonight's celebration in preparation for the Dedication of the Church of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe and its Altar of Sacrifice. In a special way, I express my gratitude to His Eminence, Francis Cardinal George, and His Eminence Justin Cardinal Rigali. Your presence brings great honor to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I am deeply grateful, too, for the encouragement and good counsel which you have given to me. I am deeply grateful, too, to my brother Archbishops, Bishops and priests. I am deeply grateful for the sacrifice which you, as true shepherds of the flock, have made to be present. We are especially honored tonight by the presence of Archbishop James Harvey, Prefect of the Papal Household. Archbishop Harvey helps all of us, when we are visiting in Rome, to meet our Holy Father. By God's Providence, he is visiting his family at this time and has made the time to participate in the Mass of Dedication.

2. All present have participated, in some way, in the founding and the development of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. While I have the honor of the title, Founder, I am deeply conscious that the Founder is Our Lord Jesus Christ and that, by His grace, He has drawn many to join me in doing what I have always understood to be His work, a work to honor His Mother in her particular love for her children, His brothers and sisters, of America.

3. We are all deeply grateful to Raymond Arroyo of Eternal Word Television Network for serving as emcee, this evening. We also thank you, Raymond, for all that you do to bring the Word of Christ to the world. In thanking Raymond, I acknowledge the extraordinary cooperation of Eternal Word Television Network in bringing the Dedication of the Church and of the Altar of Sacrifice to the many who cannot be present at the Shrine, tomorrow. Eternal Word Television Network is an extraordinary gift to the Church. I am deeply grateful for the presence

of Deacon Bill Steltemeier and ask you, good Deacon, to convey to Mother Angelica, the Foundress of Eternal Word Television Network, our best wishes and the assurance of our prayers.

4. In offering some remarks to you about the spiritual work of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I hasten to give special recognition to Sister Christa Marie, F.S.G.M., the Executive Director, and her staff and volunteers, who have carried out the day to day work which has brought us to the highest point of the work of the Shrine, the Dedication of the Church. God has provided many tests along the way of the founding and development of the Shrine. One of the severest tests was to find the right person for the work of Executive Director. It had to be a person of deep faith and of ardent devotion to the Mother of God, and a person with the administrative and organizational skills to direct a nascent shrine. It was Divine Providence Who brought Sister Christa Marie to my attention, and it was the profound love of the Mother of God, which led her superiors to mission her to the Shrine, at the earliest possible time. Sister Christa Marie began her work in September of 2003. She and I were working very well together. In November of 2003, however, the Servant of God Pope John Paul II transferred me to the See of Saint Louis. It was another test for both Sister and myself to find a way in which I could continue to direct the work of the Shrine, from a distance. Thanks be to God, it has worked. Now, Our Lord has provided another test in my transfer to the Roman Curia. As I always say to Sister Christa Marie, while, at the same time, speaking to my own deepest self, have more faith, trust in Divine Providence.

5. Throughout the entire period of development of the Shrine, the Board of Directors has provided steady leadership. In thanking Sister Christa Marie and her staff, I thank, you, the Board of Directors who have assisted me, in an essential way, to keep the work on track for the present and for the future.

6. In thanking Sister Christa Marie, I thank Mother Margaretha Maria, Superior General of the Franciscan Sisters of the Martyr Saint George, and Sister's provincial superior, Mother M.

Regina Pacis, and her revered predecessor, Mother M. Ingeborg. The Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Province of the Franciscan Sisters of the Martyr Saint George, which has a strong devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, has always understood the importance of the Shrine and have trusted me in the direction of the Shrine. As the Sisters often say to us, I now say to them: May God reward you!

7. The Shrine has an excellent staff. I hesitate to single out individuals, but I must say a particular word of thanks to Andy Brannon, the Finance Officer, who after the third executive director left in as many years, at my request, agreed to guide the work of the Shrine, until a new director could be found. Andy is most competent and well prepared for his position. But he has been most devoted to the Shrine, from the beginning, and, therefore, has been willing to take on other tasks for the good of the Shrine. I also thank, in a special way, Patricia Krause who has generously placed her considerable experience in managing a religious goods gift center at the service of the Shrine.

8. In addition to the Staff, there is an army of volunteers at the Shrine, many of whom have been volunteering for years, already. For example, all of the beautiful flowers and plants at the Shrine are under the care of volunteers who may be found, at all hours of the day and night, expressing their love of the Mother of God and of her Divine Son by keeping her Shrine as beautiful as possible.

9. Anyone who knows me well knows how much the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe is in my heart. I have always understood that my first love was the Diocese of La Crosse, then the Archdiocese of Saint Louis, and now the Universal Church through the service of the administration of justice. At the same time, I have understood, I trust correctly, the spiritual work of the Shrine to be an important way of serving the Body of Christ, both in the dioceses for which I have been called to be shepherd and in the wider Church. I hope that I have kept, in proper balance, my responsibilities. In this regard, I express heartfelt gratitude to my staff, both when I was Bishop of La Crosse and when I was Archbishop of Saint Louis. Without their

understanding and generous assistance, I would simply not have been able to fulfill my responsibilities for the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. When I was Bishop of La Crosse, three priests worked most closely with me in developing the Shrine: Monsignor Richard Gilles, the Vicar General; Father Joseph Hirsch and Father Roger Scheckel. All three are still members of the Board of Directors of the Shrine. At the present, I am especially grateful to Monsignor Henry J. Breier, my personal secretary and master of ceremonies, when I was Archbishop of Saint Louis, and Sister M. Regina van den Berg, my secretary, for all of their assistance.

**10.** With altogether special affection and gratitude, I acknowledge my dear sister Mary and her husband Jim, who have been wholehearted supporters of the Shrine, from the beginning, and have assisted the work of the Shrine in a myriad of ways. I thank, too, my brother-in-law, Charles Louis and his wife Marilyn, and my nephew, Father Kevin Louis, all of whom are present tonight and have been supportive of the Shrine.

**11.** In this context, I express my deepest gratitude to Bishop Jerome Listecki, my successor in the office of Bishop of La Crosse. Bishop Listecki has been most supportive of the work of the Shrine and has encouraged me very much in direction of the work. Thank you, Bishop Listecki.

**12.** Why did I found the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe? From the earliest years of my priestly life and ministry, which began in 1975, I was deeply struck by the loss and, in many cases, practical disappearance of the devotional life among Catholics. At the same time, I witnessed a loss of faith in the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Penance, and in the teaching authority and sacramental life of the Church, in general. In my home and in the minor seminary which I attended, the devotional life was richly fostered, especially devotion to the Holy Eucharist and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and devotion to the Mother of God, especially through the daily praying of the Rosary, and May and October devotions. I knew how much these devotions have helped me, over the years, to deepen my love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It saddened me, as a young priest, to visit homes of parishioners and not be able to find any sign of devotion. Teaching the children in the Catholic elementary school and at Aquinas High School,

I found that their faith was greatly impoverished, both from years of a catechesis which lacked substance and from a lack of the devotional life.

**13.** It seems that, after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, and perhaps before, there developed the idea that somehow the devotional life competed unfairly with the public worship of the Church. The solution was to eliminate devotions completely. While it is always possible to become exaggerated regarding a devotion and to lose the sense of its connection with Our Lord alive for us in the Church, above all, in the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist, the devotional life is a natural and essential means of deepening our communion with Our Lord in the Sacraments and extending our communion with Him into every circumstance of daily living.

**14.** When I was appointed Bishop of La Crosse in December of 1994 and especially after I was installed on February 22, 1995, in my prayer and in my reflection, I understood that I had to do something to promote the devotional life, and that the founding of a shrine, of which I had no experience and which was a daunting prospect for me, would be a key way in which to fulfill the important responsibility to foster the essential devotional life. Why a shrine? Because a shrine invites pilgrimage, and pilgrimage is one of the most ancient and most effective means of spiritual conversion and renewal. Why the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe? It seemed to me that, in a time when so many were growing forgetful of God and so many were not even being taught about God, the Mother of God would draw her children to know the mercy and love of God, Incarnate in her Divine Son. At first, the shrine was to be dedicated to Our Lady, under her title of Our Lady of Fatima. Then, through the particular love of Our Lady, under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which the Servant of God Pope John Paul II had so often manifested, I understood that the Shrine should be dedicated to Our Lady under the title of her special love of America. Deepening my own knowledge of her apparitions and message, and studying the writings of Pope John Paul II, I understood that a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe in the northern part of the United States could serve to make her apparitions and message better known, in both our nation and Canada. Our Lady, of course, draws many others from all parts of

the world to her shrine.

**15.** Tomorrow, in the homily, I will reflect more upon the apparitions and the message of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Tonight, I simply underline how timely her message is for our culture which is suffering terribly from the loss of faith in God's mercy and love, and, as a result, has become so unimaginably violent, even destroying the lives of innocent and defenseless infants in the womb, and turning the back on those who have the first title to our care, those who have grown weak under the weight of special needs, severe illness or advanced years. The violence has even entered into the first sanctuary of love, the family, and the institutions devoted to the promotion and care of human life, schools and hospitals. Even as Our Lady of Guadalupe was the Star of the First Evangelization of our continent and led her children to set aside the diabolical practice of human sacrifice and of prejudice and hatred before brothers and sisters of a different race, now, as the Star of the New Evangelization, she will lead us, I am confident, to overcome the culture of violence and death with a civilization of divine love, beginning in the family.

**16.** Earlier, I mentioned how Our Lord has tested my resolve, shared by so many others, to found the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The tests were so many, in the beginning, that I understood that the work must be very good, because I could see that Satan himself was at work to discredit and destroy it, or I must be deluded. To be frank, there were strong temptations to abandon the work. The criticism which ensued my announcement of the foundation of the Shrine took me by surprise. I knew that there would be some who would oppose the Shrine, but I did not count upon the enduring vehemence of the reaction of some, also from within the Church, to the whole notion of a shrine and pilgrimages to a shrine. During the months which followed the announcement of the Shrine, I used to dread coming down the stairs in the morning to retrieve the local newspaper which would frequently contain letters to the editor or articles severely critical or even condemnatory of the Shrine. It saddened me, too, that some who had been working with me in important missions of the Church no longer wanted to do so because I was founding and developing the Shrine.

**17.** Regarding the vehement criticism, I share with you one humorous story. At any occasion of a meeting with the media, inevitably the topic of the Shrine would be raised in an aggressive manner. On one of these occasions, a radio interviewer, referring to the negative reaction to the Shrine, said to me, with definite disdain, “Bishop, some people say that you are medieval.” My response took him by surprise and brought the interview to a rapid conclusion. I told him: “Oh, I am highly complimented that people think that I am medieval; I believe that the Middle Ages was one of the greatest periods of the history of man and of the history of the Church.”

**18.** Speaking of the negative reaction to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I want to address two points. One is the criticism that the money used to build the Shrine should have been given to the Catholic schools or to works on behalf of the poor. In response to this objection, I have simply turned to the words of Our Lord, at the Anointing at Bethany. When, just before Our Lord’s Passion and Death, the woman at the house of Simon the leper anointed His head with the costly “ointment of pure nard,” some present were indignant, saying that the precious ointment should have been sold, and the proceeds given to the poor. Our Lord responded to their indignation with these words:

Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying. And truly, I say to you, wherever the Gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her (*Mk 7:6-9*).

In other words, we are constantly to be about the work of caring for the poor, but we must honor Our Lord with our best gifts, for He is the source of our charity, and He will, by His grace, make our charity a source of grace for others.

**19.** What is more, the Shrine is for all pilgrims, rich and poor, and it cares for the greatest poverty in our time, the lack of faith, hope and love. Only when we have addressed the profound spiritual poverty of our time will we also be able to address, at its roots, the material poverty. I

know so many of the donors to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who come from all parts of our nation and even from outside our nation. Every donor whom I know is generous not only in his or her expression of devoted love of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, but also in support of the Catholic schools and of the Church's care of those in most need. It is of the nature of a shrine to inspire a deeper consciousness of the needs of the Church and a greater generosity in responding to those needs.

**20.** Another repeated criticism of the Shrine was that it would be redound to the financial ruin of the Diocese of La Crosse. I understood, from the beginning of the work of the Shrine, and all those who have worked with me for the Shrine have understood that it must support itself. Never have any funds been taken from the Diocese of La Crosse for the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Also, it has been a firm principle of the Shrine to operate without debt. The Shrine has no debt. The Shrine depends completely upon the gifts of those devoted in love of Our Lady of Guadalupe. While the Shrine is in constant needs of gifts, I trust that God will continue to inspire generous donors, so that this important work may continue. My heartfelt thanks to all of you who are the benefactors of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Your gifts have made possible the foundation and development of the Shrine.

**21.** Having spoken a bit about the trials which the foundation and development of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe have encountered, I must say that the far greater part of the story of the Shrine is comprised of the heartfelt and generous response of devout Catholics, in La Crosse and from all parts of the country and beyond, as they have come to know about the Shrine. One of the most moving aspects of the work of the Shrine has been to witness individuals who were strongly opposed to the Shrine become its most avid supporters, even to the donation of hours and hours of volunteer time. Also, practically from the beginning, the pilgrims have come and those who have not been able to come have written or communicated in other ways, to ask the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe and especially to ask that a candle be lighted for their intention in the Votive Candle Chapel. The beauty of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe is itself the testimony that the Shrine has been more than sustained, through her trials, with the

devotion of countless faithful Catholics. To you are donors to the Shrine, I express the hope that the beauty of the Shrine is a worthy reflection of the love of Our Lady and Her Divine Son, which you have expressed by your gifts.

**22.** In speaking of the beauty of the Shrine, I hasten to express deepest gratitude to Fowler and Hammer, the General Contractors; to all of the subcontractors and individual workmen; to the principal architects, Michael Swinghamer of River Architects and Duncan Stroik of the University of Notre Dame; and to the many artists and artisans who have placed their considerable gifts at the service of this important spiritual work. Throughout the construction of the Church, there has been a remarkable response of the workers. Early on in the construction, I was visiting the site and expected to hear boom-boxes playing and loud conversation among the construction workers. I found, instead, the workers quietly and diligently carrying out their tasks. I commented to one of the workers about the reverent atmosphere. He look at me, who must have appeared to him to be a bit clueless, and stated simply: “This is a holy place.”

**23.** In speaking about the history of the support of the Shrine, I express an affectionate and profound gratitude to Mary Lucille Swing and her family, who have donated the eighty acres on which the Shrine has been developed. The location of a fitting site of the Shrine was a great challenge, at the beginning. I was set upon retrieving the former monastery of the cloistered Dominican nuns for the Shrine. Because I am somewhat hard-headed, God had to show me, in several ways, that it was not to be the site. Very shortly after accepting the fact that I did not have a site for the Shrine, I met Mrs. Swing and her daughter, Jeanne Pavela, at Aquinas High School. They told me that they had heard that I was looking for a site for the Shrine and invited me to look at some land which the late Mr. Robert Swing had purchased decades earlier and had hoped, because of its extraordinary beauty, could be used for the spiritual and religious good of others, even as it had so served him and his family. Once I had visited the site, I did not need any convincing. As you know, it is a portion of land, which is paradigmatic of the natural beauty of the Coulee Region. Not only have Mrs. Swing and her family donated the land, but they have faithfully devoted themselves personally to the work of the Shrine. We all owe them the deepest

debt of gratitude. I trust Robert Swing, Mary Lucille's husband, is pleased with the spiritual work which has been developed on the extraordinarily beautiful tract of land, which he first purchased.

**24.** In these days, I am frequently asked whether the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe has turned out in the way that I had hoped. I can only say that it has turned out to be so much truer to the nature of a shrine, truer to the immeasurable beauty of God's mercy and love toward us, than I could ever have imagined. I am also asked whether I am proud of the Shrine, especially of the Church of the Shrine. My response is that I am, first of all, profoundly grateful to almighty God Who alone has made the Shrine possible. I am deeply proud, but it is a pride in what God has accomplished through the hands of so many. It is a pride which is, at root, humility, for it recognizes how God has brought, to this point, his work, notwithstanding my feeble efforts.

**25.** The work of the Shrine continues. Earlier, I alluded to the essential relationship of catechesis to the devotional life, and their irreplaceable role in the life of faith. From the beginning, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe was to be a center of catechesis, particularly, a center for the spiritual and doctrinal formation for catechists, after the plan of the Servant of God Father John A. Hardon, S.J., Founder of the Marian Catechist Apostolate. The development of the Shrine has necessarily followed stages, as the funds have been available. The Pilgrim Center came first, for we could not have pilgrims making their way to the Church, unless we could first welcome them, provide them hospitality and give them an orientation to the Shrine. Then, came the Mother of Good Counsel Votive Candle Chapel, and then the Stations of the Cross, the outdoor shrine of Saint Joseph, the Rosary Walk, the outdoor shrine of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, and the Memorial to the Unborn. Now that the construction of the Church is nearly complete, the next work is the building of the Marian Catechetical Center and Retreat House, which will both house the center for the spiritual and doctrinal formation of catechists, and a retreat house in which catechists and others can spend a few days on spiritual retreat at the Shrine. Please pray that the gifts for the building of the Marian Catechetical Center and Retreat House will come soon and in a sufficient amount, so that the building can begin.

**26.** The arrival of the Friars of the Immaculate to provide the essential spiritual ministrations at the Shrine has been the latest blessing upon the Shrine. I express to Father Stefano Mary Manelli, Superior General, and Father Peter Damian Mary Fehlner, and to all of the Friars my heartfelt gratitude for their generous response to my request of their mission at the Shrine. The Friars of the Immaculate, as their name indicates, have a particular devotion to Mary Immaculate, according to the spirituality of Saint Maximilian Mary Kolbe. They also are devoted to the spiritual work of shrines and pilgrimage. Thank you for the warm and generous welcome which you have already given to the Friars. Please continue to assist them and please pray for the Friars who are just beginning their service at the Shrine.

**27.** Finally, I ask your prayers for an abundant outpouring of God's blessings, tomorrow, through the Rite of the Dedication of the Church of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe and of its Altar of Sacrifice. Please continue to pray for the Shrine, that it may remain always faithful to its most noble mission which is of critical importance to the new evangelization of America. Whenever we are about some very good work, Satan is all the more at work to sow the seeds of confusion and error, and to discredit and even destroy the good work. For that reason, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe very much needs your prayers and your continued support.

**28.** Once again, I thank you so much for your presence, this evening. I wish that I could recognize each of you, individually. I thank, in a special way, Father Benedict Groeschel, whom I so deeply admire, for his very generous words in toasting me. Thank you, Father Benedict.

**29.** For all of you, it is my prayer that your days at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe will fill you with new enthusiasm and new energy for the living of your vocation and mission in the Church. I pray that, whenever you are tempted by fear or doubt about doing all that God is asking of you, you will go to Our Lady of Guadalupe. She will enfold you within her mantle and hold you securely in her arms, for she is indeed our Mother, the Mother of America and the Star of the New Evangelization.

Thank you. May God bless you.