

QUEEN OF THE AMERICAS GUILD ANNUAL CONFERENCE
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, LA CROSSE
JULY 31, 2009

KEYNOTE

ADDRESS:

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE AND THE PRIESTHOOD

Introduction

1. The apparitions and the message of Our Lady of Guadalupe at Tepeyac Hill and in the home of Juan Bernardino, uncle of Saint Juan Diego, reflect, in a wonderful way, the beauty, indeed the splendor, of the Church and of her teaching. In coming to America to manifest the mercy and love of God toward all men, without boundary, Our Lady manifests her Divine Son, the fullness of the expression of the Father's mercy and love. In manifesting her Divine Son, Our Lord Jesus, she also manifests the Church, His Mystical Body, which is borne from His glorious pierced Heart and upon which He never ceases to pour forth, from His glorious pierced Heart, an abundance of divine grace for man's eternal salvation. In the apparitions and message, we behold the relationship of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Church and are inspired to live more completely and intensely our life in Christ in the Church with Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of His Mystical Body.

2. One of the particularly striking aspects of the apparitions and message of Our Lady of Guadalupe is Our Lady's relationship with the Church's hierarchy, with the pastoral office in the Church, which is exercised by the Bishop in communion with the Roman Pontiff and the priests, the Bishop's co-workers. In this Year for Priests, inaugurated by His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, on June 19, 2009, the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, it seems especially appropriate to reflect upon Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Priesthood.

Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Bishop

3. At her first apparition, Our Lady of Guadalupe makes it clear that her mission of manifesting the mercy and love of God to His children of America can only be accomplished through the office of the Bishop. In other words, the Bishop's pastoral office is irreplaceable

in providing for the spiritual life of the faithful. When she tells Saint Juan Diego that she wants a chapel to be built in which she can manifest the Divine Mercy, she also instructs him about the necessary obedience to the Bishop in accomplishing her mission. She tells him:

And to bring about what my compassionate and merciful concern is trying to achieve, you must go to the residence of the Bishop of Mexico and tell him that I sent you to show him how strongly I wish him to build me a temple here on the plain; you will report to him exactly all you have seen, admired and what you have heard.¹

The rest of the five apparitions all center around the conversations of Saint Juan Diego with the Bishop in order to accomplish Our Lady's desire that a chapel, a place of pilgrimage, be built to which she could draw pilgrims for an encounter with her Divine Son. The office of Bishop is clearly at the heart of what Our Lady of Guadalupe so much desires to do for her children.

¹ *Nican Mopohua: Original Account of Guadalupe in A Handbook on Guadalupe*, New Bedford, Massachusetts: Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, 1997, pp. 194 and 196.

4. At the second apparition, Saint Juan Diego informed Our Lady of the Bishop's respectful questioning of the truth of what Juan Diego had reported to him. As a result, Saint Juan Diego strongly urged the Mother of God to send a different and more authoritative messenger whom the Bishop would more readily believe. Our Lady responded to Saint Juan Diego that indeed he was her chosen messenger and that he should return to the Bishop, the next day, in order that the Bishop understand the request of the Mother of God and, therefore, order the work of building the chapel to begin.²

5. Our Lady appeared for the third time to Saint Juan Diego after his second visit to the Bishop. During the second visit, the Bishop remained deeply impressed with Saint Juan Diego's sincerity and steadfastness. As a result, he prudently asked Saint Juan Diego to give him a sign that the message had come from "the Lady from heaven" herself.³ During the third apparition, Saint Juan Diego explained the need of a sign, and Our Lady promised to provide the sign for Juan Diego to take to the Bishop, on the following day.

6. At the fourth apparition which happened a day later than anticipated because of the grave illness of Juan Bernardino, the uncle of Saint Juan Diego, with whom Juan Diego was living and for whom he was caring, Our Lady provided the sign which the Bishop requested, namely, the miraculous Castilian roses and other flowers. After Saint Juan Diego had gathered the flowers and Our Lady had arranged them in his tilma, she instructed him with these words:

² cf. *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, pp. 196-197.

³ *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, p. 198.

My youngest and dearest son, these different kinds of flowers are the proof, the sign that you will take to the Bishop. You will tell him from me that he is to see in them my desire, and therefore he is to carry out my wish, my will. And you, who are my messenger, in you I place my absolute trust. I strictly order you not to unfold your tilma or reveal its contents until you are in his presence. You will relate to him everything very carefully: how I sent you to the top of the hill to cut and gather flowers, all you saw and marveled at in order to convince the Governing Priest so that he will then do what lies within his responsibility so that my house of God which I requested will be made, will be built.⁴

The roses and other flowers are at once a powerful sign of the truth of what Saint Juan Diego had been reporting to the Bishop and of Our Lady's unconditional respect for the office of the Bishop who alone can give permission for a chapel, for a new place of pilgrimage within his jurisdiction. He is "the Governing Priest" who must discipline the works of devotion in his jurisdiction in order that the life of the Church be built up in unity, giving glory to God and manifesting His mercy and love to all. Our Blessed Mother as the first and most excellent member of the Church shows, in a striking way, the beauty of obedience to the episcopal office in the Church.

7. The fourth apparition, in a certain sense, is extended beyond the encounter with Our Lady at Tepeyac during which Saint Juan Diego received the sign for the Bishop, for the sign, at its presentation, was immensely greater than the gift of miraculous flowers. The sign included a lasting image of Our Lady of Guadalupe written on the tilma of Saint Juan Diego by the hand of God, which image only became visible in the presence of the Bishop. The account of Saint Juan Diego tells us:

⁴ *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, p. 201.

He then opened his white mantle which held the flowers, and as the different precious flowers fell to the floor, then and there the beloved Image of the Perfect Virgin, Holy Mary, Mother of God, suddenly appeared in the form and figure in which it remains to this day and is preserved in her chapel at Tepeyac called Guadalupe.⁵

Our Lord confirmed Our Lady's desire of a place of pilgrimage, under the authority of the Bishop, in a most extraordinary manner by providing a living image of Our Lady on the tilma of Saint Juan Diego, by which the Mother of God has continued to appear to pilgrims who have come to visit her throughout the centuries since 1531.

8. The first person to see the image and to kneel before it in veneration was the Chief Shepherd of the flock, the Bishop. He not only gave approbation to the building of the shrine for Our Lady, but he gave the example of the devoted love to be shown to Our Lady. The original account of the presentation of the sign to the Bishop tells us:

⁵ *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, p. 203.

The Lord Bishop prayed in tears begging forgiveness for not having immediately carried out her will to do what she wanted. He rose to his feet, and untied the mantle from around Juan Diego's neck on which the heavenly Queen's Image was imprinted and took it to his private chapel. He detained Juan Diego, who remained another day at the Bishop's house. The following day he said, "Come, let us go to see the place where the Lady from heaven wants her temple to be built." People were immediately invited to build her "sacred little house."⁶

Bishop Juan de Zumárraga became the first to offer devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

9. During the fifth apparition, the apparition to Juan Bernardino, Saint Juan Diego's dying uncle, Our Lady of Guadalupe also underlined the irreplaceable witness and direction of the Bishop in carrying out her mission and, in particular, in announcing her name. When, after the miraculous sign had been given to the Bishop, Saint Juan Diego left the Bishop's residence to check on the condition of his uncle, Juan Bernardino, he found his uncle totally cured. Juan Bernardino recounted the apparition of Our Lady to him, during which she immediately cured him, informed him of the mission which she had given to his nephew and explained the nephew's failure to return home on December 12th. The account of the fifth apparition concludes with these words:

⁶ *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, p. 203.

At the same time, the Lady told Juan Bernardino that as soon as he saw the bishop he must reveal to him the miraculous manner in which she had effected his cure and that he should convey to him the proper name for her blessed Image, The Perfect Virgin Holy Mary of Guadalupe⁷

The fifth apparition is a further and striking confirmation of the maternal care of the Mother of God for all who have come to life in her Divine Son and, in a special way, for the aged, the gravely sick and those with special needs. Once again, Our Lady underlines the service of the Bishop as a true shepherd of the flock, acting in the person of Jesus, the Good Shepherd and Head of the flock, in confirming and fostering the news of the apparitions and message of Our Lady. Our Lady took care that the name by which her apparition was to be known be communicated to the Bishop who alone could make it official.

Our Lady of Guadalupe and Priests

10. The irreplaceable service of the ordained priest is central to the account of the apparitions and message of Our Lady of Guadalupe. At the very beginning of the account, when, at the first apparition, Our Lady inquired with Saint Juan Diego about where he was going, he responded:

⁷ *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, p. 204.

My Lady, my Queen and my little Girl, I am going to your house in Mexico-Tlatilolco to continue the study of the divine mysteries taught us by the images of Our Lord, our priests.⁸

In his direct and unadorned manner of speaking, Saint Juan Diego gives expression to the sacramental reality of the ordained priesthood. Through the laying-on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the soul of the priest is marked with a new character enabling him to act in the person of Christ, Head and Shepherd of the flock. In the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church,

⁸ “Mi Señora, Reina, Muchachita mía, allá llegaré a tu casita de México Tlatilolco, a seguir las cosas de Dios que nos dan, que nos enseñan quienes son las imágenes de Nuestro Señor, nuestros Sacerdotes.” *Nican Mopohua*, n. 24, in *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, p. 194.

In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts *in persona Christi Capitis*.⁹

To call priests “images of Our Lord” is to recognize the mystery of the Sacrament of Holy Orders by which Christ continues to be the Head and Shepherd of the flock in every time and place.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1548.

11. We well know that the grace of Holy Orders does not protect the Bishop or priest from human weakness or sin.¹⁰ Our respect for the reality of the sacramental character means that we pray daily for our Bishop and priests, so that they never fail to draw upon the grace of the Sacrament of Holy Orders in overcoming their human weaknesses and in resisting the temptations to sin. We pray that the reality of the “image of Our Lord” in the priest will be visible in his manner of acting at all times and will not be obscured or soiled by his human weakness or through his personal sin.

12. In this regard, it is important to note the outstanding service of the Franciscan Friars at the time of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Through the example and teaching of the Friars, especially Bishop Juan de Zumárraga, the Native Americans came to understand their own great dignity as sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of God the Son Incarnate, and the Spanish explorers were led to the conversion of their hearts to Christ in their relationship with the Native Americans.¹¹

13. On the Sunday after the second apparition, which had taken place on Saturday afternoon, Saint Juan Diego went to his parish church at Tlatilolco to receive instruction in the faith and to participate in Holy Mass. Only after having participated in the Holy Mass did he proceed to visit the Bishop for the second time.¹² Once again, the substance of our life in the Church and the irreplaceable service of the priest are underlined. Saint Juan Diego had a special mission from Our Lady of Guadalupe, but it could only be carried out by fidelity to Church teaching and to participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

14. Between the third and fourth apparition, the figure of the priest once again enters into the story of the apparitions and message of Our Lady of Guadalupe. As you will recall, at the third apparition, which took place on Sunday afternoon, December 10th, Our Lady of Guadalupe promised to provide the sign which the Bishop had requested. Saint Juan Diego was to return the

¹⁰ cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1550.

¹¹ cf. Warren H. Carroll, *Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Conquest of Darkness*, Front Royal, Virginia: Christendom Press, 1983, pp. 78-86.

¹² *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, p. 198.

next day, December 11th, to receive the sign, but, when he arrived at the home he shared with his uncle, Juan Bernardino, on Sunday evening, he found his uncle ill to the point of dying. He remained with Juan Bernardino for the entire day of December 11th, not keeping his appointment with Our Lady. The official account tells us:

The next day, Monday, when Juan Diego was to take the sign to the bishop in order to be believed, he did not return. During the night, the uncle begged him to go to Tlatilolco to bring a priest to hear his confession and prepare him for dying, knowing that his time had arrived, and that he would never get well.¹³

In the very early morning of December 12th, Juan Diego was hurrying to Tlatilolco, in order to bring the priest to provide the Last Rites for his dying uncle. When Our Lady stopped him on his way, he once again gave expression to his Catholic faith in the ordained priesthood. In his greeting of Our Lady, Saint Juan Diego declared:

¹³ *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, p. 199.

And now I hurry to your little house in Tlatilolco to call on the beloved ones of Our Lord, our priests, to hear his [Juan Bernardino's] confession and prepare him for death.¹⁴

In his response to Our Lady, Saint Juan Diego expressed the intimacy of the relationship of the priest with Our Lord, for the priest participates in the high priestly office which belongs exclusively to Our Lord.

Vision of Episcopal and Priestly Orders

15. The vision of the episcopal and priestly Orders in the account of the apparitions and message of Our Lady of Guadalupe underlines the teaching, sanctifying and governing offices of the Bishop and priests. The teaching office of the Bishop and priests is the context in which the apparitions take place; Saint Juan Diego is going to the priests to receive instruction in the faith. What is more, Our Lady's image and message are a brilliant exposition of the central mysteries of the faith, for which the Bishop and priests have a principal responsibility.

16. Connected essentially with the teaching office is the sanctifying office of the Bishop and priests. From the official account, it is clear that the parish church at Tlatilolco is a second home for Saint Juan Diego, for it is there that he is taught the Word of Christ and administered the Sacraments. He also refers to it as Our Lady's house, for it is the home of the Communion of Saints who are always united around the altar of sacrifice and in silent adoration before the tabernacle. The account makes it clear that Saint Juan Diego is faithful in participating in Sunday Mass and in seeking the Sacrament of Penance and Last Rites for his dying uncle.

17. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the apparitions and message, from the point of view of the episcopal and priestly Orders, is the obedience of Our Lady and of her messenger, Saint Juan Diego, to the governing authority of the Bishop and priests. Our Lady herself submits in obedience to the authority of the Bishop, recognizing that the Bishop and his priests act in the person of her Divine Son. The whole account brings to mind words of Saint John Mary Vianney, quoted by Pope Benedict XVI in the letter by which he proclaimed the Year for Priests, from the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 2009 to the same Solemnity in 2010:

¹⁴ *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, p. 200.

Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest. Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of your life? The priest. Who feeds your soul and gives it strength for its journey? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest. And if this soul should happen to die [as a result of sin], who will raise it up, who will restore its calm and peace? Again, the priest....¹⁵

Our Lady of Guadalupe in manifesting the mercy and love of God opens our eyes anew to the great and irreplaceable gift of the priesthood in the Church.

18. Our Lady of Guadalupe, who rightly bears the title of Star of the First Evangelization and Star of the New Evangelization, uncovers for us, as if for the first time, the great gift which is the priesthood exercised by the Bishop and his priests, his co-workers. In his *Letter* “Proclaiming a Year for Priests,” Pope Benedict XVI, quoting the words of Saint John Mary Vianney, “The priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus,” declares:

¹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Letter* “Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the *Dies Natalis* of the Curé of Ars,” 16 June 2009, ¶ 3.

This touching expression makes us reflect, first of all, with heartfelt gratitude on the immense gift which priests represent, not only for the Church, but also for humanity itself, I think of all those priests who quietly present Christ's words and actions each day to the faithful and to the whole world, striving to be one with the Lord in their thoughts and their will, their sentiments and their style of life. How can I not pay tribute to their apostolic labors, their tireless and hidden service, their universal charity? And how can I not praise the courageous fidelity of so many priests who, even amid difficulties and incomprehension, remain faithful to their vocation as "friends of Christ", whom he has called by name, chosen and sent?¹⁶

Our Lady of Guadalupe, coming to America to manifest the immeasurable mercy and love of God, leads us to an ever deeper appreciation of the reality of the ordained priesthood in the Church and to an ever deeper love of priests.

19. How much we, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful, need to reflect on the image of the Bishop and priests in the apparitions and message of Our Lady of Guadalupe! How much we need a deepened appreciation of the teaching office of the priest, especially in the Sunday homily! The exercise of the teaching office can easily bring incomprehension and resistance in a culture which teaches us that each of us is the author of his or her own "truth." Priests are tempted to offer words which please, which are, in popular parlance, "politically correct," instead of the words which challenge and indicate the narrow way which leads to eternal life (*Mt 7:14*). The faithful are tempted to reject any word which contradicts the worldly wisdom which all too easily insinuates itself into our daily living.

20. The irreplaceable service of the priest in catechesis, especially the instruction of catechumens and the baptized who are seeking the full communion of the Church, is underlined in the Guadalupe account. In our own time, too often, the priest, whether by his own choice or not, is kept distant from the work of catechesis which is seen to be the work of professional catechists. The service of the catechists is necessary, but it cannot be effectively offered except under the

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Letter "Proclaiming a Year for Priests,"* ¶ 1.

direction and with the example of the priests. Referring to the example of Saint John Mary Vianney, Pope Benedict XVI writes to priests:

The Curé devoted himself to his parish's conversion, setting before all else the Christian education of the people in his care. Dear brother priests, let us ask the Lord Jesus for the grace to learn for ourselves something of the pastoral plan of Saint John Mary Vianney!¹⁷

The Bishop and his priests are the first catechists in the Diocese and in the parish. It is fundamental to their office in the Church to catechize and to prepare spiritually and doctrinally those who assist them with catechesis.

21. How much, too, we need to see anew the sanctifying office of the priest, especially in the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and in the administration of the Sacrament of Penance! Even as, in our time, there has been a great loss in Eucharistic faith and in sacramental faith, in general, so, too, there has been a loss of reverence for the priesthood. It is seen in priests who do not use the outward signs of their priestly office and in various ways wish to present themselves as no different from any other member of the Church. Such a loss of self-identity is reflected in a careless celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice and the other Sacraments, which obscures the action of Christ in the Sacraments. The loss of reverence for the priesthood is seen, too, in a familiarity with priests, which does not express their spiritual fatherhood toward us, for example, addressing priests by their first name or a nickname and referring to them in conversations in the same way. Such familiarity quickly obscures the truth that without the priest there would be neither the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist nor the Sacrament of Penance for us.

¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Letter* "Proclaiming a Year for Priests," ¶ 4.

22. Referring to the example and teaching of Saint John Mary Vianney, Pope Benedict XVI urges priests to discover their identity in the Eucharistic Sacrifice: “He was convinced that the fervor of a priest’s life depended entirely upon the Mass.”¹⁸ Surely, priests who celebrate the Holy Mass each time, as if for the first time, will lead the faithful in their priestly care to an ever deeper appreciation of the great Mystery of Faith, which is the Holy Eucharist.

23. Inherent to the new faith in the Holy Eucharist, which is at the heart of the New Evangelization, is the new appreciation of the Sacrament of Penance. Regarding the Sacrament of Penance, Pope Benedict XVI urges priests to a new zeal in drawing the faithful to the Sacrament:

¹⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Letter* “Proclaiming a Year for Priests,” ¶ 7.

This deep personal identification with the Sacrifice of the Cross led him [Saint John Mary Vianney] “by a sole inward movement” from the altar to the confessional. Priests ought never to be resigned to empty confessionals or the apparent indifference of the faithful to this sacrament. In France, at the time of the Curé of Ars, confession was no more easy or frequent than in our own day, since the upheaval caused by the revolution had long inhibited the practice of religion. Yet he sought in every way, by his preaching and his powers of persuasion, to help his parishioners to rediscover the meaning and beauty of the sacrament of Penance, presenting it as an inherent demand of the Eucharistic presence. He thus created a *virtuous circle*. By spending long hours in church before the tabernacle, he inspired the faithful to imitate him by coming to visit Jesus with the knowledge that their parish priest would be there, ready to listen and offer forgiveness.¹⁹

Before the great mystery of God’s love of us in the Holy Eucharist, we know our own sinfulness and are led to the confession of our sins. Our Lord forgives us our sins through the ministry of the priest and thus prepares us to receive Him in Holy Communion and to live our communion with Him in the various situations of our everyday life.

24. Finally, the apparitions and message of Our Lady of Guadalupe open our eyes anew to the essential service of the Bishop and his priests in the governance of our life in Christ. As mentioned above, Our Lady herself submits her mission in obedience to the authority of the Bishop. Her mission, in every way, leads the pilgrim to imitate her obedience in seeking to do God’s will in all things. The governing office of the Bishop and priests is perhaps the most challenging of their responsibilities in a culture which is radically individualistic and secular, and resists submission to authority, in general. The priest can easily be tempted to flee from the demands of his office of governance, thinking that, notwithstanding his failure to govern, his teaching and sanctifying offices will be fulfilled. But all three offices depend upon one another, such that teaching which is not supported by governance appears to be insincere, and the celebration of the sacred rites without governance is readily compromised through liturgical abuses.

Conclusion

¹⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Letter* “Proclaiming a Year for Priests,” ¶ 8.

25. As we gather for the annual meeting of the Queen of the Americas Guild and for the celebration of the First Anniversary of the Dedication of the Church of this shrine, let us open our minds and hearts to all that Our Lady of Guadalupe teaches us about the Sacred Priesthood. In the Year for Priests, which we have just begun under the guidance of Pope Benedict XVI, let us pray with new fervor for our Bishops and priests, asking that they may come to a new appreciation of the reality of their vocation and mission in the Church, and that the flock in their care may come to know, obey and love Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, in them.

26. It is my strong desire that the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe be rich in prayer and devotion offered on behalf of our priests throughout the Year for Priests, and that such prayer and devotion become ever more a pattern of the life of the Shrine. It is my prayer that priests who come in pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe will discover anew the wonder of their life in the Church. It is my prayer that all the faithful who come on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe will grow in their devoted love of their Bishop and their priests. I close with the prayer which Pope Benedict XVI offered at the conclusion of his *Letter* “Proclaiming a Year for Priests”:

To the Most Holy Virgin I entrust this Year for Priests. I ask her to awaken in the heart of every priest a generous and renewed commitment to the ideal of complete self-oblation to Christ and the Church which inspired the thoughts and actions of the saintly Curé of Ars.²⁰

The Most Reverend Raymond L. Burke
Archbishop Emeritus of Saint Louis
Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura

²⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Letter* “Proclaiming a Year for Priests,” ¶ 16.