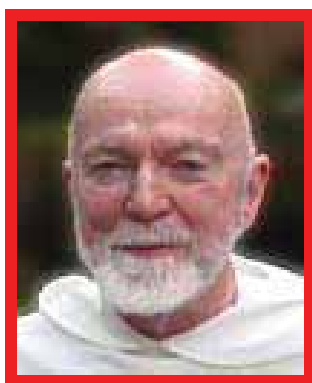


*¡Feliz Navidad!*



May the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe shower her blessings upon all of you and your loved ones during this holy season of Advent and Christmas.

In the Peace of the Christ Child,  
*Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.*



*Br. Boniface Willard, O.P.*

Dear Mission Friends:

As I read the following article by Br. Boniface Willard, O.P. on the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexicali, I felt a great deal of emotion: I have been re-assigned to minister at our mission there and will be settled in by the time of Our Lady of Guadalupe's Feast Day celebration this year.

I will, however, remain as director of both the Mission Office and the Shrine of St. Jude, thanks to the efficiency of Nancy Loscavio and Lesley Warnshuis in the former, and of Stedman Matthew in the latter, as well as to a fuel-efficient car and email!

In the dimming twilight of a chilly winter evening in early December, a handful of people begin to gather in front of the chapel of *San Martín de Porres y San Juan Macías*. The Dominican fathers and sisters are trying to organize them to begin the procession as close to on-time as possible. The altar boys arrive with their white *sotanas* and blue cinctures, excitedly vying with one another to see who will be the first to carry the cross and candles. A large cart bearing a statue of the Virgin Mary and adorned with flowers is wheeled into position, and the men prepare to pull it along the two to three mile route from the chapel to the parish church of *Santa María de Guadalupe* (right).

Then one of the Dominicans, very often Fr. Bartholomew de la Torre, O.P., calls for silence and begins the first prayer.





*Altar boys lining up for the procession.*

It is the first day of the *novenario*, or nine days of processions and Masses, in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Although they never forget her, it is particularly at this time of the year, in early December, that the people of Mexico celebrate the appearance of the Virgin Mary to a poor Indian convert, Juan Diego, on December 9, 1531, on the hill of Tepeyac near Mexico City. Declaring herself to be the Virgin Mary, the Mother of the true God, she asked that a church be built in her honor on that very spot, and there she would show her love and compassion for the peoples of Mexico.

Juan Diego went to the bishop, Fray Juan de Zumarraga, and told him of the Virgin's request. The skeptical bishop sent him away. The same thing happened the next day, and the bishop asked for some sign that it was indeed the Virgin Mary who had sent Juan Diego. Later, Juan Diego, on an errand for his sick uncle and actually trying to avoid the Lady, encountered her again on the opposite side of the hill. He told her of the bishop's request, and she instructed him to cut flowers from the top of the hill. Astonished at finding so many Castilian roses in full bloom in the midst of winter, he gathered some together in the folds of his cloak, or *tilma*, and carried them to the bishop. When he opened his *tilma* in the presence of the bishop, on it was a beautiful image of the Mother of God.

Soon, people from all over Mexico came to view the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the *tilma* and to give thanks to God for having sent His Mother to them.

And to this day, they are still giving thanks. The *novenario* is celebrated throughout Mexico in diverse manners. Soon after the founding of the Santa Maria de Guadalupe Parish, the pastor, our Fr. David Bello, O.P., began the beautiful custom of having a procession on each of the nine nights, followed by a Mass that begins once the procession has arrived at the church.

And even as the parish grew from a small chapel with a handful of faithful to a lovely church with a thriving congregation of hundreds, so the procession grows each night.

At first there are only a few people. Once the hour has come and everything is ready, the altar boys lead off while men wearing reflective vests use flashlights to guide traffic around the procession. To introduce the rosary, the group sings a hymn in honor of the Virgin, and a different one in between each decade. How many different hymns in honor of their Mother the people sing from memory!



*The image of the Virgin arrives at the church.*



*Fr. Bello and the bishop blessing the people as the procession arrives at the church.*

As the rosary progresses, the procession grows. While children hand out rosaries to those who do not have them, Fr. Bartholomew and sometimes a helper walk up and down the streets, inviting those on the sidelines to join the procession and come to Mass, if not this night, then the next. Many join eagerly and the procession gets longer and longer; others wait and watch, but most will come at least to Mass on the twelfth, Our Lady of Guadalupe's actual Feast Day.

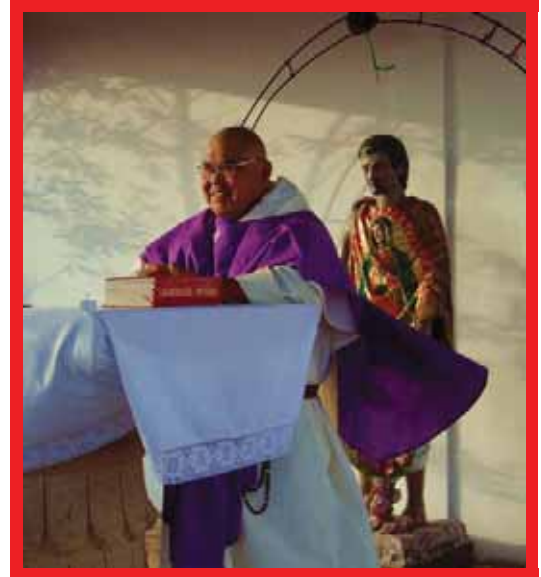
And every year, often on December 9, the feast of St. Juan Diego, the pastor and

parishioners of *San Juan de Los Lagos*, out of which parish our own Dominican parish was erected some 15 years ago, join the procession while the pastor celebrates the liturgy and preaches.

At various points along the route, rockets are lit and sent into the air, exploding with a deafening *Boom!*, notifying those waiting at the church that the procession is, with each rocket, nearing its destination, and those waiting respond with rockets of their own. When the rosary ends, the people pray the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary and sing hymns written about the apparitions, especially *La guadalupana*, the refrain of which says, "*From heaven one beautiful morning, the Virgin came down to Tepeyac.*"

And finally, after more than an hour of walking and praying and singing, the procession arrives at the church, where the celebrant blesses the people with holy water as they enter. After Mass, there are tamales and *champurrado*, a traditional Christmas-time drink made with chocolate and hominy flour.

The last and largest procession of the *novenario* occurs on the evening of December 11, with, on occasion, the bishop as celebrant of the vigil Mass. After Mass, groups of girls or young women dressed in the attire of the indigenous peoples perform traditional dances in honor of the Virgin. Then the



*Fr. Bello, Pastor of the parish, saying Mass.*

people keep vigil, coming and going as the need or mood dictates, singing hymns, praying the rosary, and keeping company with the Virgin until midnight, when the vigil's silence is broken as the bells of all the churches begin tolling and hundreds of rockets explode.



*Young people enjoying the kermés.*

And the day of the feast is ushered in with the singing of *Las mañanitas*, a song sung to celebrate birthdays and saints' days:

*Estas son las mañanitas,  
que cantaba el Rey David.  
Hoy por ser día de tu santo,  
te las cantamos a ti.*

*Despierta, mi bien, despierta,  
mira que ya amaneció,  
Ya los pajarillos cantan,  
la luna ya se metió.*

**These are the morning verses  
That King David sang.  
Because today is your  
saint's day,  
We sing them to you.**

**Wake up, my dear, wake up,  
And see that day has  
dawned.**

**Already the little birds are  
singing,  
And the moon has gone down.**



*The Virgin asks Juan Diego,  
"Am I not your Mother?"*

On the twelfth, Masses are celebrated throughout the day--the first one near dawn, the last ending after night has fallen. Meanwhile, all around the church, a large festival, or *kermés*, is going on, with food and games, singing and dancing, well into the night. And at last, as the cold winter air begins to disperse the people back to their homes, the pastor gives the signal to light the *castillo*, a large structure of fireworks of many sizes and shapes, and for a time the night sky is lit up in hues of red and gold and blue. And then the *fiesta* comes to an end, with a little melancholy for the passing of the day, but with joyful hope that with the coming of another year, they will all be there to once again honor their Mother, and give praise and thanks to the God who sent her to them on that little hill of Tepeyac so many centuries ago.

*--Br. Boniface Willard, O.P.*

### *Our Lady of Guadalupe,*

*who blessed Mexico and all the Americas by  
your appearance to Juan Diego, intercede for  
the holy Church, protect the pope, and help  
everyone who invokes you in their necessities.*

*O Mystical Rose, hear our prayers and our  
petitions. Since you are the ever Virgin Mary  
and Mother of the true God, obtain for us  
from your most holy Son the grace of keeping  
our faith, sweet hope in the midst of the  
bitterness of life, burning charity, and the  
precious gift of final perseverance. Amen.*



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