



Our Lady of Guadalupe Toolkit
December 2024



Introduction

Every year on December 12th, we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Who is Our Lady? And why is she so important to the Church?

The Feast of our Lady of Guadalupe goes back to the 16th century. On December 9, 1531, a poor Indigenous man named Juan Diego experienced an apparition of Our Lady. As he was traveling to Mass that morning, he

“heard beautiful music like the warbling of birds. A Radiant cloud appeared, and within it stood an Indian maiden dressed like the Aztec princess. The lady spoke to him in his own language and sent him to the Bishop of Mexico, and he was to build a chapel in the place the lady appeared”

Our Lady of Guadalupe visited him four times between December 9 and December 12. In his native language, she told him, “Let your face and heart not be troubled, don’t be afraid ... Am I not here who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and bosom?”

In response to this encounter, Juan Diego went to the archbishop of Mexico City, Juan de Zumárraga, and told him what had happened. At first, the archbishop did not believe him, but after some coaxing Archbishop Zumárraga told Juan to have the lady give him a sign, and Our Lady provided him with roses for San Juan to carry to the Bishop In his cape also known as a tilma. When he arrived at the Archbishop’s residence on December 12th, he opened his tilma and the flowers fell to the floor, revealing a miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe exactly as she had appeared.

Reflection:

San Juan Diego was a poor Indigenous man from Mexico, he was a convert to Christianity, and the apparition of Our Lady to San Juan was a rebuke to the treatment of Indians and Indigenous by the Spaniards. This event caused some nine million Indigenous to convert to the Catholic faith. How has the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe touched your heart and in what ways can you use her story to touch the heart of others?

Seven fascinating facts about the Tilma of Guadalupe

[The Tilma of Our Lady of Guadalupe](#) carries with it a significant amount of symbolism. Below are a few compelling claims made of the tilma:

- 1. The Image Remains Intact:** The tilma is made from cactus fiber, which typically deteriorates after 15-20 years. However, despite being created in 1531, nearly 500 years later, the tilma is still in perfect condition.
- 2. Stars on Her Mantle:** The shimmering stars on Our Lady's cloak form the exact constellation visible in the sky on the day of her apparition in 1531. Remarkably, the stars are arranged as if seen from outside the universe, not from Earth. The constellation of Virgo, symbolizing purity, is over her heart, and Leo, representing Jesus as the Lion of Judah, is positioned near her womb.
- 3. Constant Temperature:** The tilma consistently maintains a temperature of 98.6°F, which matches the normal temperature of the human body, regardless of the surrounding environment.
- 4. Aztec Symbols of Life and Divinity:** A four-petaled flower on Our Lady's womb is an Aztec symbol of life and divinity, reinforcing her role as the patroness of the unborn.
- 5. Divine Origin of the Image:** It is hard to image how the image on the tilma could have been painted by human hands. Tests show the colors are not derived from natural, animal, or mineral sources. The image is iridescent, shifting in color at different angles, and the eyes of Our Lady reflect a scene believed to show Juan Diego and the bishop at the time of the tilma's unveiling.
- 6. Scriptural Connection:** Revelation 12:1 describes a woman "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet." This mirrors the depiction of Our Lady standing in front of light like the sun, with a crescent moon beneath her, as seen during her apparition.
- 7. Two Heartbeats:** The tilma has been found to exhibit two heartbeats: one near her heart and another near her womb, suggesting the presence of life.

Patroness of Migrants, Forcibly Displaced Peoples and The Americas

In 1999, Pope John Paul II declared Our Lady's Feast Day on December 12th be celebrated across Churches in the Americas and gave her the title the "Patroness of The Americas" as well as the "Star of the New Evangelization".

Our Lady of Guadalupe is also known as the Patroness of Migrants and Forcibly Displaced Persons. She is also the patron saint of Mexico, and has held a significant meaning for many people, including migrant communities as they seek her intercession during their migration experience. One way that we can celebrate the feast day is through continued reflection, prayer, and education on issues pertaining to migration, refugees and people on the move.

Although Our Lady is deeply important to Mexicans, her influence extends far beyond Mexico. There are shrines to her all over the world, including the Philippines, Kenya, and South Korea. Our Lady of Guadalupe has given strength to generations of people; her image has been invoked as a symbol of strength in struggles such as the Mexican War of Independence and the United Farm Workers movement.

The Church recognizes that many people migrate out of necessity rather than choice and when they cannot provide the necessities to support life in their homeland, they have a right migrate elsewhere for this purpose. To that end, Pope John XXIII stated in *Pacem in Terris* that "every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own State. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular State does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men."

What does the Church mean by the "right to migrate"?:

Pope Francis strongly advocates for the "**right to migrate**" as an essential human right grounded in the dignity of the person and the teachings of the Gospel. This right emphasizes that individuals and families should have the freedom to seek a better life, safety, and opportunity in other countries if their current conditions are unsafe or lacking.

Pope Francis has consistently spoken about the right to migrate, focusing on the **humanitarian** and **moral** dimensions of migration. For him, migration is not only a matter of policy but one of **justice, compassion, and solidarity**. He stresses that people should not be forced to leave their homes due to **extreme poverty, war, persecution, or climate change**, but if they do, their dignity must be respected, and they should be welcomed, protected, and integrated into their host countries. Thus, the “right to migrate” can be understood as a corollary to the “right not to migrate.” We should thus put into place policies and other mechanisms so that people can thrive at home and not feel forced to migrate elsewhere.

Pope Francis’ commentary on migration are not merely theological musings but deeply aligned with his pastoral concern for marginalized and vulnerable populations, especially those fleeing conflict, poverty, or environmental disaster. His calls to action urge a shift in perspective—moving from seeing migrants as burdens to recognizing them as fellow human beings, whose contributions and lives are valuable.



Celebrating her Feast Day: How can I support migrants on her Feast Day and throughout the year?

God calls us to welcome the stranger, and Our Lady of Guadalupe reminds us that God's unfailing love encompasses all of us, regardless of immigration status, race, nationality, and all other differences. As we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we honor the millions of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in the United States and across the world who live in fear because of their immigration statuses and the current political climate around migration. On this day, you can...

Listen

- Join a feast day celebration hosted by Latin American community members.
- Hold an event of your own (ex. a panel or a reception) that uplifts the voices and stories of Latin American or migrant parishioners.
- Be sure that your feast day Mass highlights the importance of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Latin Americans and migrants and involves parishioners from those communities.
- Incorporate some traditional elements above into your celebration.

Educate

- Talk to parishioners and friends about Catholic Social Teaching around migration and Our Lady of Guadalupe's message.
- Share information about the current issues around migration in the United States and discuss ways to help.

Give

- Donate money or requested items to help immigrants and refugees through your local [Catholic Charities](#).
- Reach out to your local Catholic Charities about ways to volunteer your time to help migrants in your community.

Advocate

- Tell your elected leaders that you support immigrants and the programs that help them, including DACA and TPS. Mail letters, make phone calls, or meet with their staff. You could even invite them to your celebration.
- Use social media or write a Letter to the Editor to voice your support for migrants. Explain why Our Lady of Guadalupe's feast day is an important reminder to love and advocate for immigrants and refugees.