

# Our Lady of Guadalupe

ST. LUCY'S CHURCH, NEWARK, NJ

ΑΜ Ι ΝΟΤ ΗΕΡΕ?  
"Ι ΑΜ ΨΟΥΕ ΜΟΤΗΕΡ"

Σ...ΝΟ ΕΣΤΟΥ  
ΨΟ ΑΦΙΙ  
ΦΙΕ ΣΟΥ  
ΤΙ ΜΑΔΡΕ...?



# Our Lady of Guadalupe



## St. Gerard shares his house with his mother

This year the winter was severe and long. Spring did not arrive easily; there were so many abrupt changes in the weather. One evening in May we were conversing on the steps of St. Lucy church. The plaza was bright with color and invited us to experience quiet peace and joy. The solemn statues of saints made from white Carrara marble were in contrast with the deep green of the lawn that was soaking up the soft evening sun.

We were engaged in making plans for the coming activities of the Spanish-speaking community when two members of the Italian-speaking community approached and, hearing us speak about plans, intervened with a Proposal that stunned us.

- If we have understood well, Guadalupe is very important in your history and hearts. Why not bring an image to our church?
- Where would we put it?
- In the back of the church there is a space that has not been used for years. That could be a good choice.
- But we know that this is an "Italian church" and it must be preserved as a museum.

Our parents were from Caposele and they were the ones who brought to this church devotion to Saint Gerard. They were poor immigrants. Devotion to Saint Gerard gave them the strength to overcome thousands of difficulties and to make room for themselves in this society. In him they saw the paternal face of God who always loves us and never abandons us. We know what is like to be poor and have a strong desire to get ahead. The door is open. This church is a monument to the faith, tenacity and dreams of a people. The presence of Guadalupe will be a sign today of a reality very similar to what the Italians lived through. The "small Tepeyac" will be a monument to the faith of people, to the search for a better life and a new moment in history. Our ancestors did not build a monument like those in cemeteries, but they built a place of life and made dreams become real. This is what needs to be preserved. Welcome, let's walk together.

St. Gerard, the protector of young people who are finding it difficult to have children, is a symbol of a people who found it difficult to have a life of dignity and to prosper.

Now there are other immigrants who are risking all to bring about new life. Many of them are from the American continent who see in Our Lady of Guadalupe the tangible sign of God's protection. She was the strength that resurrected the Aztec people when they felt defeated and without hope for a future.

San Gerardo and Our Lady of Guadalupe are the expression of God's special love for poor peoples and simple persons who want to get ahead. We want to express this marvelous reality by affirming that **St. Gerard shares his house with his Mother.**







## The path to integrating the community

The Church of St. Lucy in Newark opens its doors to new immigrants and proposes to create a way to help each other by coming together and forming a pluralistic community united in living one mission.

### The path to integrating the community

1. Help the Italian, English, French and Spanish-speaking communities to get to know each other with respect and appreciation, also by working together. We want this undertaking of creating the "Tepeyac of Newark" to help integrate the different ethnic groups. The Church of St. Lucy does not offer us a place where each group celebrates its own rituals and activities separately, but rather an open heart in which each group feels part of the same family.
2. In the annual parish planning create events in which the different ethnic groups and parish groups participate and celebrate together.
3. Offer appropriate catechetical input to foster the spiritual journey, based on the message of Guadalupe and the history of St. Gerard.
4. On the 12th December each year celebrate at St. Lucy the "day of the immigrant" to recall where we come from and how St. Gerard and Our Lady of Guadalupe accompany us on our journey in search of a better life. This will help us to be in solidarity with one another and remain open to address the new forms of marginalization and poverty.
5. Strengthen our parish identity as a communion of communities in which differences are not an obstacle to being together but enrich the life of our parish family.

## THE MESSAGE OF GUADALUPE

**What took place between the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego at Tepeyac?**

The most ancient account of the Guadalupe apparitions were written in the Náhuatl language with the title of "Nican Mopohua".

## The First Apparition

It was 1531. The Aztec People had been defeated and humiliated by the Spanish. At Tlatelolco in Mexico there is an inscription in marble that says, "Our gods have been defeated." It was their gods who gave strength and value to the people. Their defeat meant that the gods of the conquerors were more powerful and consequently there was no hope that the situation could get better. The future would see the death of the people.

The meaning of the apparitions is established in this context. Our Lady of Guadalupe represents the new religion. She came to inform the people that the Christian God loved them and wanted to lift them up from their misery, and pursue with them a future of freedom and human dignity.

On that morning of 1531 while Juan Diego was approaching Tepeyac he was drawn by the mysterious and enchanting song of birds that symbolized the appearance of divinity. On the same mountain that was sacred to the Aztec people as a place where divinity dwelled, Juan Diego met Our Lady of Guadalupe. There was some continuity between the faith of the Aztec People and the Christian faith.

The Virgin entrusted her project to Juan Diego: "I very much want and ardently desire that in this place a hermitage be erected for me. In it I will show and give to the people all my love, compassion, help and protection.

Because I am the Mother of Mercy, your mother and the mother of all who live on this earth and love me, who speak to me, search for me and trust me. Here I will hear their groans and resolve and cure their miseries, sufferings and sorrows."

And she sent him to speak in her name to the Spanish bishop, Friar Juan de Zumárraga. Without delay Juan Diego set out for the city to take the message to the bishop. As soon as he was before the bishop he presented the thought and words of the Lady from Heaven and what she wanted. And he also told the bishop all that had amazed him, what he had seen and heard.



When the bishop heard all that Juan Diego had to say, he did not really believe him. The bishop responded, "My son, you will have to come back another time, when I can listen to you calmly; I still need to see. I will carefully look into what you came for, from the beginning, and consider what you are asking and desire." The Bishop was a good person who believed in God. He just did not believe in the Indians.

## The Second Apparition

Juan Diego went back to the Virgin and expressed his sadness that he had not been heard. At the same time he asked that she send someone else, someone better prepared and of higher rank.

The Virgin answered, "Listen my little son, the most abandoned; in your heart you know that I have many servants and messengers to whom I could give this task and they would convey my thought so that my will would be fulfilled. But it is absolutely necessary that you be the one who will go and speak my words so that my desire and purpose become reality through your mediation and assistance. I earnestly ask you, the most abandoned of my children, and I earnestly command you to go back to see the Bishop again tomorrow".

The Virgin believed in the Indian and his ability to represent God.

Juan Diego presented himself to the Bishop again, and the Bishop asked him that the Virgin give him a sign to so that he could believe. Clearly an Indian's word was not enough.

In fact, he asked persons whom he trusted to follow and keep an eye on Juan Diego. Juan Diego slipped away and they lost sight of him. They went back to the Bishop and in their report they give us a clear picture of what they thought of Indians. "So they went back to the Lord Bishop, prejudicing him so that he would not believe. They told him that Juan Diego was just deceiving him, that he only imagined what he told the Bishop, that he dreamed or invented it. So they all decided that if Juan Diego would come back again, they would seize him and have him harshly punished, so that he would cease to tell lies and deceive people."

## The Third Apparition and Uncle Bernardino

Juan Diego went back to the Virgin and she promised to give him the sign requested by the Bishop. "On the following day, Monday, when Juan Diego was supposed to take to the Bishop the sign that would give him credibility, he did not go back, because when he arrived home he learned that his uncle, Juan Bernardino had contracted smallpox and was dying."

Juan Diego suffered a conflict of interest. Should I go to help my uncle who is dying or should I go to meet the Virgin? What would you have chosen? Which is more important, a religious duty or to help someone in need. His uncle Bernardino symbolized the Aztec people who were dying, and so the question was: Will this religion (i.e., Catholicism) that the Virgin represents save the life of the People and give them a future?

Does religion belong in the temple or in the street? Juan Diego decided to go help his uncle. His people were more important to him than religion. He skirted around Tepeyac trying to avoid the Virgin. She saw him and went to meet him. Juan Diego explained to her that his uncle was gravely ill. And the Virgin answered him, "Am I not here as your mother?" The problem is to not to have to choose between the Virgin and his uncle, or to put religion in conflict with the needs of the people. The problem of a dying people is a religious problem. The purpose and role of religion is to make life more human and fraternal.

The Virgin then invites Juan Diego to go to the top of the hill to gather roses as the sign that he will show the bishop. In the Nahuatl culture roses were a symbol of the qualities, especially of the truthfulness, of the native people. Going up the mountain meant to Juan Diego that he was he was entering into the mystery of God, resulting in a sense of positive self-worth, a deep awareness of his reality. He gathered together the roses and put them in his mantle. Of course, it was difficult to find roses on a rocky hill in winter, just as it was difficult for the religion of the conqueror to recognize anything good in the Aztec religion or in the Indian people. Juan Diego took the roses to the Bishop. After waiting for a long time he was at last admitted into the presence of Bishop Zumárraga. "Today in the morning when it was still dark she ordered me to come to see you again. But I asked her for the sign and proof that she sent me to carry out her will that she had promised to give me. And she gave it to me immediately.

"She sent me to the top of the hill where I had first seen her to cut some flowers from Castile. After I had cut them, I carried them down the hill. And she with her little hands took them and arranged them in the fold of my mantle, so that I should bring them here to you and give them to you personally.

"I was not surprised nor did I doubt, even though I knew that the top of the hill is not a place where flowers grow, that all one finds there are rocks, thorns, spiny acacias, prickly pears and mesquite bushes.

"As I reached the summit of the hill, I was amazed; it was a garden in bloom. It was covered by every kind of flower from Castile, covered with dew, shining. Immediately I set about cutting them.

"And she told me that I had to hand them over to you, so that you could see the sign that you had requested and believe in her will; also so that the truth of my words and message will be apparent. Here they are. Graciously receive them."

He then opened his white mantle in the folds of which he was carrying the flowers he had gathered, and instantly all the different flowers of Castile fell on the floor. In that instant there suddenly appeared, as if painted, the precious image of the ever-Virgin Holy Mary, Mother of God (Téotl), just as it is still kept now in her precious house, in the little chapel of Tepeyac that is called Guadalupe.

The Bishop was converted (to believe in) the Indian. He saw in him the presence of God (Guadalupe) and so he was able to construct the church in the new world, not one of walls, but the Church as the family and work of God.

# Our Lady of Guadalupe



## The Virgin of Guadalupe embraces you with a mother's love

They had just notified Juan Diego that his uncle was dying. So he decided to set out immediately to help his uncle. However, since this was at the same time that he was supposed to carry out an errand for the Virgin, he thought he would take a shortcut in order to pass by unnoticed. From the hilltop the Virgin saw him and went to meet him. Juan Diego tried to excuse himself, explaining that his uncle was gravely ill. The Virgin shared Juan Diego's sorrow and concern and told him: "Am I not here as your mother?" The uncle, Bernardino, represents the people who had been conquered, rendered submissive and prostrate without hope of raising their head. The people felt destroyed and had no hope for the future. With her motherly heart the Virgin is at one with Juan Diego and she assures him that he is not walking alone, that he has a mother who watches over him and will never abandon him. She will help him overcome his lowly condition and build a better and more dignified future for himself and his people.

Over more than 500 years the Virgin has been seeking out her sons and daughters to assure them of her mother's love and give them hope along their life's journey. She is alive and has crossed the border without concern for documents, moved solely by love for her children.

How many times in your life have you found yourself in the same situation as Juan Diego. You are Juan Diego and your mother, the Virgin of Guadalupe, wants to heal your wounds, clear up your confusion, fill your emptiness and give you back hope and joy. You can find her in your house, at work, in your joys and sorrows.

Your personal relationship with her is just fine, but you also need to meet with her as a family, so for this reason we have set up the "Tepeyac in Newark" (Tepeyac is the name of the hill where she met Juan Diego). There we are aware of her living presence and we manifest to her our love and affection as a community. From this "Tepeyac" she follows our journey, helps us to overcome our differences, and to live as brothers and sisters; she helps us to attain our dream of dignified and profound happiness.

## Patron of the American Continent

We come here from many different countries and in each of them we have beautiful churches where we show Mary our affection and gratitude for her motherly love.

Pope John Paul II on his fourth visit to Mexico proclaimed the Virgin of Guadalupe the Queen of Mexico and the Emperor of America, and in January 1999 he raised the celebration of December 12 to the liturgical rank of Feast for the whole American Continent. And so in her we discover a common basis on which to build our life project and our service to Society.

It is not a question of setting aside what we learned to love and venerate in our childhood with our parents and grandparents. We rather seek to come together to establish that we are family. In our numerous families we experience that, although we are brothers and sisters, we are each different and unique.

We also share the experience that only our mother was able to keep us united. We are taught to accept ourselves, to share, to learn how to forgive, to drop resentment, to love God and our neighbors, and even to love people who hurt us. We want this place to be our "Tepeyac of Newark": a place where we experience the love of a mother who, as much as she loves us with our peculiarities and differences, helps us to live as a family in solidarity with those most in need.

The unity of our family around the Virgin of Guadalupe includes and appeals to all the ethnic groups of Latin America. In our parish this means "communion" between the Italian, Hispanic, African and Asian communities.

At the same time our "Tepeyac of Newark" is intended to extend beyond the boundaries of St. Lucy to reach all the sons and daughters of Our Lady of Guadalupe.





## The “Tepeyac of Newark” and our commitment to create a more human world

- At a time when the political and economic powers that be are deaf to the cries of the poor and exclude them from having a dignified life.
- at a time when having many cultures and differences makes social dialogue difficult,

God is manifesting his living presence and listening to the cry of the people; through Mary of Guadalupe he says to us:

**Am I not here as your Mother?**

This is the good news that fills us with hope, strengthens us and overwhelms us with joy.

*In the Church of St. Lucy in Newark, NJ there is a “small Tepeyac” to proclaim forcefully, incisively and efficaciously this good news.*

The construction of the replica of the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego is backed up by a series of practical initiatives that express the will of God to assist his people.

The Spanish-speaking community of St. Lucy:

1. will give you a hand by helping to introduce you to the way people are and how they live in the USA. We need to establish a sincere and open dialogue between our cultures of origin and the culture of the people of the United States and their way of understanding life.

2. help you to maintain your personal identity. In contact with other worlds and ways of being one can get confused. In an open and trusting dialogue with many cultures we offer you a way to be faithful to your deepest personal identity and your culture. For this reason

- We celebrate the more important feasts, both religious and civil, of each Latin American country, for example, its Independence Day.
- Three times a year we sponsor an exhibition of the typical handicrafts proper to each country.
- We create special moments when we present regional examples of folk-dancing.

3. We get together with experts in the history and culture of Latin American countries, as well as critical assessments of what is happening in Latin America today.

4. You will have an opportunity to take part in leadership training, whether in civil or religious affairs.

5. During the year we also put on health and education fairs as well as opportunities for professional training.

6. We organize and support initiatives that help the Hispanic community to grow, to take advantage of the opportunities that this country offers and obtain the benefits that we need to have a more dignified life, for example, a driver's license, or help with immigration procedures.

7. You will always find a friendly person who can give you a hand, or an open door for you to give a hand to someone who needs help.

***Join this effort and take part in building a new world.***



### St. Lucy's Church National Shrine of Saint Gerard

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