




Dolorosa

OCTAVE DAY OF THE EPIPHANY

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THE PERFECT EFFORT

I, Who Am Your Mother




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In 2017 the *Collins Dictionary* Word of the Year, which was actually two words, was *fake news*. In recent times this word or phrase has become quite popular. *Fake news* is defined, according to the *Collins Dictionary*, as “false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting.” In other words, fake news is false or misrepresented information reported as though it were the truth. President Donald Trump frequently makes use of this term in referring to the information broadcast by certain liberal news outlets, such as CNN.

Unfortunately, *fake news* has also been employed to disparage information that is true, but which godless men seek to discredit. I saw this recently in an article written the week of December 12th. While the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which is celebrated on the 12th, is not on the Church’s calendar, it is nonetheless among the many beautiful feasts of Our Lady. It is also a day of joyous celebration for many Catholics, especially for those of Mexican-American descent. The purpose of the article given to me was to show that the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and the tilma of Juan Diego, which bears the miraculous image of Our Lady, are nothing more than frauds. The author referred to the miraculous facts concerning the tilma as fake news. But nothing is further from the truth.

For centuries scientists have examined and carried out various tests on the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The majority of them have come away with the same conclusion: there is no scientific explanation for it. Despite this, many a scientist and writer hostile to God and religion will

reject any notion of the supernatural in Juan Diego’s tilma. So hateful are these people to Almighty God that even if the supernatural were to stare them in the face, they would refuse to believe. Such is the case with Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Among the various inexplicable characteristics of the tilma are these six:

▪ **The image shows no sign of deterioration.**

Juan Diego’s tilma is made of ayate fiber. This material typically disintegrates in 15 to 30 years. Yet, the image of Our Lady has remained perfectly intact for over 487 years without fading or cracking. All replicas made on similar cloths and preserved in the same conditions have lasted no longer than 10 years. (Johnston, Francis. *The Wonder of Guadalupe*. 117-118)

▪ **The tilma has endured for centuries.** Not only has the tilma not deteriorated, but it has also shown itself to be virtually indestructible. In 1785, a worker who was cleaning the glass case accidentally spilled nitric acid onto a large portion of the image. This acid should have eaten away the tilma, but, instead, only slight stains appeared which can still be seen in the upper right side. Furthermore, in 1921 an anti-clerical activist concealed a bomb in some flowers and placed it on the altar beneath the image. When the bomb exploded, the marble altar rail and windows 150 feet away were shattered, a brass crucifix was twisted out of shape, but the image was not damaged in the least. (Johnston 119)

▪ **The stars that appear on Our Lady's mantle are astronomically correct.** In 1983 Dr. Juan Homero Hernandez and Fr. Mario Rojas Sánchez discovered that the stars on the image correspond exactly to the constellations of the winter sky on December 12, 1531. Interestingly, the constellations are shown in reverse. In other words, they are portrayed as if one were looking down on the universe from heaven. ("Our Lady of Guadalupe." *EWTN*. 10 January 2019, *EWTN.com*)

▪ **The tilma appears to be living.** In 1979, when Dr. Philip Callahan, a biophysicist, was analyzing the tilma using infrared technology, he discovered that the tilma maintains a constant temperature of 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit—the same as that of a living person. Furthermore, it is said that a stethoscope was placed just below the black four-petaled girdle at the waist of Our Lady (which is a sign that she is both a virgin and expecting a child). Heartbeats were heard at 115 beats per minute, the same as that of a baby in the maternal womb. ("Ten Amazing Facts About the Miraculous Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe." *Viva Guadalupe*. 7 January 2019, *VivaGuadalupe.org*)

▪ **Our Lady's eyes are lifelike.** Scientists have discovered that the retinas of Our Lady's eyes expand and contract with light, as does the human eye. What is even more amazing is that the microscopic likeness of a bearded man was discovered in the pupils of the Virgin. The man corresponds to contemporaneous pictures of Juan Diego. Such a thing is truly incredible for it is impossible for any human being to have painted such an image because it is too small to produce. Jose Aste Tonsmann, a Peruvian ophthalmologist, examined the eyes at 2,500 times magnification. He identified thirteen individuals in both eyes at different proportions. Apparently, the images correspond to the very moment that Juan Diego opened the tilma before the bishop and his retinue. (See picture on page 7.) (Johnston 122-130; *VivaGuadalupe.org*)

▪ **Our Lady assumes a different ethnicity depending on one's vantage point.** This is a unique characteristic of the tilma. It is said by some authors that at one distance Our Lady appears to be a Native American, but at another distance she appears to be of European descent. (*VivaGuadalupe.org*)

These are but a few of the most astounding



facts regarding the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. They have been discovered by science and medicine, as well as by merely seeing the tilma with one's own eye.

The wondrous discoveries regarding the image, then, are not fake news as the author of that article indicated; they are fact. To assert that these discoveries are phony in light of the countless hours of testing and research done on the tilma is surely the heights of arrogance. This is especially true because such people either do not offer any evidence to back their assertions or they propose some petty humanistic explanation to discredit the Catholic Church. Indeed, it would seem that such people would say and do anything to lead others away from God. Clearly, they are the ones disseminating false information or, at the very least, misrepresenting it. Instead of being fraudulent, then, the tilma is proof that Our Lady did appear with a message for Juan Diego in 1531.



King Henry VIII

Martin Luther

That year—1531—marked a period of turmoil for the Church. It was a time in which the devil was making inroads in the war for souls. Eleven years earlier, in 1520, Father Martin Luther, an Augustinian priest, was excommunicated for his heresy and revolt against the Church and ultimately against God. In 1531 he was still at large in Germany sowing the seeds of heresy and rebellion which would grow and eventually choke the life of grace from the souls of countless millions. Furthermore, on March 8, 1531, King Henry VIII of England assumed the title of “Supreme Head of the Church in England.” At length, he, too, severed himself and the entire English nation from the Catholic Church and from the life of grace. It was thus in the persons of Martin Luther and Henry VIII that Satan found two generals who would aid him in his war against God and souls and be instrumental in the eternal damnation of millions.

While the devil was hard at work in Europe, the Mother of God took advantage of the situation to claim souls for heaven. She turned her attention to Mexico, a country dominated by paganism and idolatry. There, she went on the morning of Saturday, December 9th, 1531.

Juan Diego, a 57-year-old, devout Aztec Indian, was making his way to morning Mass. Since he was running late, he rushed around the hill called Tepeyac. As he hurried along, he heard a sudden burst of the sweet song of birds. Quite surprised by this, Juan stopped. It was winter and the birds were supposed to be gone for the season. In *A Woman Clothed With The Sun*, Ethel Cook Eliot describes what happened next. She writes:

Quite soon the shrill caroling stopped as suddenly as it had begun, with no lingering twitters. Such a silence with no breath of warning unnerved Juan. He didn't resume running. He stood listening to the silence, straining for some sound, any sound to break the spell. It came almost at once, but it was as astounding in that place and at that time as the

bird music had been. A woman was calling down to him from the ruinous rocks at the top of Tepeyac hill. Though day had broken, Juan couldn't see her. A frosty mist, a brightening cloud hid the rocks and the woman who was calling. She was calling him by name, and urgently: 'Juan! Juan Diego! Juanito! Juan Dieguito!' (41)

Juan had no idea who she was. He had never before heard her voice. Nonetheless, he decided to climb to the top of the hill to see what she wanted. What he saw when he reached the top startled him even more. Although the sun had not yet reached the horizon, he saw a young girl, about sixteen years old, standing as if against the sun. Golden rays surrounded her from head to foot. She was beautifully arrayed in a pale red or rose gown with a blue mantle bedecked with stars. The dry grass and the thorn trees all around her were alive and splendidous.

At length, as Eliot relates, the girl addressed Juan in his native tongue. “Juan,’ she said, ‘smallest and dearest of my little children, where are you going?’” (42)

“My lady and my child,’ Juan said, ‘I was hurrying to Tlaltelolco to see the Mass and hear the Gospel explained’” (42).

“Dear little son,’ the girl said, ‘I love you. I want you to know who I am. I am the ever-virgin Mary, Mother of the true God who gives life and maintains it in existence.’” Continuing, she said:



‘I desire a [church] at this place where I will show my compassion to your people and to all people who sincerely ask my help in their work and in their sorrows. Here, I will see their tears; I will console them and they will be at ease. So run now to Tenochtitlán (Mexico City) and tell the Lord Bishop all that you have seen and heard.’ (42)

As soon as the Blessed Virgin revealed who she was, Juan fell to his knees. He assured her he would do as she asked. Then, rising to his feet, he bade her a humble farewell and headed towards Mexico City.

Having arrived at the bishop’s residence, Juan attempted to obtain an audience with him. Eventually, Juan was admitted into his presence. The bishop was Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga. Bishop Zumárraga kindly listened to Juan Diego’s story. He was impressed by the Indian’s sincerity and humility. After Juan Diego finished, the Bishop asked him a few questions and ended the meeting by telling Juan that he would give Juan’s words some thought. Juan graciously thanked Bishop Zumárraga and then headed back to Tepeyac hill.

By this time the sun had almost set. Juan Diego was tired and hungry, but he was determined to give the Blessed Virgin an update on her request. When he reached the top of the hill, Our Lady was there, waiting for him as though the meeting had been arranged.

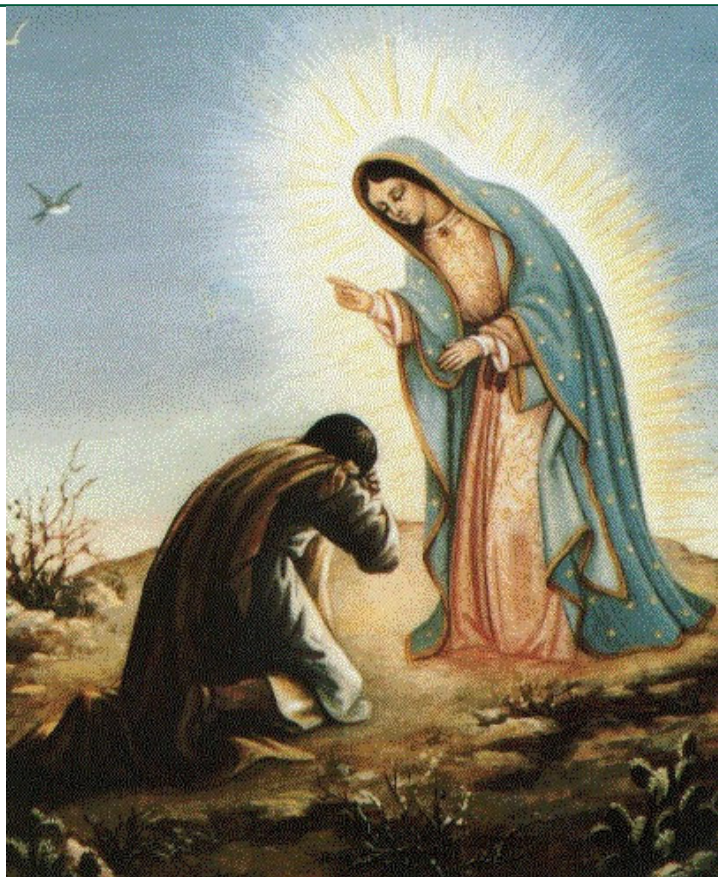
Kneeling before her, Juan explained that he had told the bishop about what he had seen and heard and of her request that a church be built on the hill. He informed Our Lady that the bishop did not believe everything he said and that he thought perhaps Juan was mistaken. Concluding, Juan said, “I fear I should get no further. I am not worthy of your trusting me with a message so important. Please send someone more suitable; for I am a nobody. . . . Forgive my boldness in advising you” (45).

Our Lady smiled gently at Juan and answered him in these words:

‘Listen, little son. There are many I could send. But you are the one I have chosen for this task. So, tomorrow morning, go back to the Bishop. Tell him it is the Virgin Mary who sends you, and repeat to him my great desire for a church in this place.’ (45)

“I will do so willingly,” Juan said, ‘though I fear the Bishop may not be pleased to see me back so soon. . . . Tomorrow I will return here to tell you how my second try comes out’” (45).

The next morning, after hearing Sunday Mass, Juan Diego returned to Mexico City. There, he paid another visit to Bishop Zumárraga. The Bishop again listened patiently to what Juan had to say. The earnestness with which Juan Diego spoke moved the Bishop to begin believing that perhaps the Indian was not deluded. But still, the Church always proceeds most cautiously in giving



her approval, even tacitly, to apparitions. And so, Bishop Zumárraga sought more proof. He suggested that Juan Diego ask the Blessed Virgin for a sign which would prove that she was who she claimed to be.

“I desire a [church] at this place where I will show my compassion to your people and to all people who sincerely ask my help in their work and in their sorrows. Here, I will see their tears; I will console them and they will be at ease.”

After leaving the bishop’s residence, Juan returned to the hill. There he found Our Lady again waiting. Falling to his knees, Juan humbly informed her that Bishop Zumárraga had asked for a sign.

“Very well, little son,” the Blessed Mother said. “Come back tomorrow at daybreak. I will give you a sign for him.” Then, with all the affection of a mother for her child, Our Lady said, “You have taken much trouble on my account, and I shall reward you for it. Go in peace, and rest” (48).

On leaving Tepeyac hill, Juan went to visit his Uncle Juan Bernardino. He found the old man sick with a deadly fever. Gathering some herbs and medicines, Juan Diego did everything humanly possible to nurse his ill uncle back to health. Consequently, he missed his



-Our Lady of Guadalupe Heals Juan Bernardino

Monday morning appointment with the Blessed Virgin Mary. On Tuesday morning Juan Bernardino took a turn for the worse. He felt certain that he would not live much longer, so he besought his nephew to hurry to Tlaltelolco to ask the priest to come and administer the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. Juan obeyed immediately.

As he hurriedly made his way to Tlaltelolco, Juan Diego decided to go around the east side of Tepeyac hill. "It was on the west side that the Blessed Virgin first saw me and called me up to her," he must have thought to himself. "If she's there now," he reasoned, "she will see me again, and she might call me again. This would mean delay when each minute my uncle draws nearer to death."

However, Juan's innocent plan to avoid Our Lady did not work. In *A Woman Clothed With The Sun*, Ethel Eliot tells us that "[Juan] was hardly started on the eastern path when he saw [the Blessed Virgin] descending Tepeyac at an angle that would intercept him just beyond the next curve" (49). It was too late for Juan to turn back, for he knew that Our Lady had surely spotted him.

"Least of my sons," Our Lady asked, "what is the matter?"

Quite embarrassed, Juan sought to make light of the situation. "My Lady!" he exclaimed, "why are you up so early? Are you well?" Then, in a more serious tone, he said, "Forgive me! My uncle is dying of [fever] and desires me to fetch a priest to give him the Last Sacraments" (49).

In *Am I Not Here*, Harold J. Rahm, S.J., tells us that Our Lady replied gently to Juan Diego. She said

'Hear and let it penetrate into your heart, my dear little son: let nothing discourage you, nothing depress you; let nothing alter your heart or your countenance. Also do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety or pain.

Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? in the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else that you need? Let not the illness of your uncle afflict you, because he is not going to die now of what he has in himself. Be sure that he will get well.' (45)

Our Lady then asked Juan Diego to go to the top of the hill, cut the flowers that were growing there, and then return to her.

"My dear little son: let nothing discourage you, nothing depress you; let nothing alter your heart or your countenance. Also do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety or pain."

Although it was in the cold of winter and no flowers could possibly be in bloom on the frozen hill, Juan did not question Our Lady's words. As he approached the top of the hill, he saw that beautiful Castilian roses were indeed blooming. In obedience to Our Lady's wish, he cut the fresh, fragrant flowers and laid them in his tilma, an Aztec garment similar to a long cape, to protect them. He then returned to the Blessed Virgin.

Our Lady arranged the roses in the tilma to her liking. She then tied the tilma so that nothing could spill and placed it around Juan Diego's neck. After she finished, the Blessed Virgin said, as Ethel Eliot relates:

'You see, little son, this is the sign I am sending to the Bishop. Tell him that now he has his sign, he should build the [church] I desire in this place. Do not let anyone but him see what you are carrying. . . . Remember, little son, that you are my trusted ambassador, and this time the Bishop will believe all that you tell him.' (50)



After receiving Our Lady's command, Juan Diego bade her a loving farewell and departed for Mexico City. As far as we know, this was the last time that Juan Diego saw the Blessed Virgin on earth.

At length, Juan reached the episcopal residence and obtained a meeting with Bishop Zumárraga. This time several of the Bishop's household were present. What happened next is vividly described in the words of Ethel Eliot:

Juan unhaltingly advanced and stood before the episcopal chair. . . . [There] he stood all the minutes it took to tell what the Blessed Virgin had urgently requested. . . . He added nothing and left out nothing. . . . Then Juan Diego put up both hands and untied the corners of the [rough] cloth behind his neck. The looped-up fold of the tilma fell; the flowers he thought were the precious sign tumbled out and lay in an untidy heap on the floor. (51)

But Juan's confusion over this mishap was nothing to what he felt immediately after it. Inside of seconds the Bishop had risen from his chair and was kneeling at Juan's feet, and inside of a minute all the other persons in the room had surged forward and were also kneeling. Juan would have thought they were praying except that he himself seemed the object of their rapt gazes. But no, it was his tilma, that now hung down to his ankles. (52)

The miracle of the roses was sign enough of the authenticity of the Indian's visions, but the Blessed Virgin had trusted him with an even more wonderful

sign. What she had imprinted on his vision and memory at the time of the first apparition, now—three days later—was imaged in glorious beauty on the front of his tilma. (52)

In the seven years that followed these events, eight million natives were instructed in the Faith and baptized. This is perhaps the greatest miracle of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for, at a time, when Satan and his agents on earth were winning numerous souls to the cause of hell, Our Lady came to earth to win souls for heaven's cause. Needless to say, she succeeded in a most incredible way.

“Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? in the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else that you need?”

Throughout the years, the Mother of God has come to earth on numerous occasions with messages for her children. As she has done through the centuries, so she did in 1531. She came to earth with a message. The message that she revealed 487 years ago to Juan Diego was simply this: she is our Mother, she loves us more than anything else on this earth, and she will always be with us if we but call upon her and stay near to her. “Am I not here who am your Mother?” she asked Juan Diego. “Are you not under my shadow and protection?” “I will show my compassion to your people and to all people who sincerely ask my help in their work and in their sorrows. I will see their tears; I will console them and they will be at ease.”

What a wonderful Mother she is! How loving and solicitous is her motherly care! In return she asks for nothing but our love. All she desires is that we love her and her Divine Son as she loves us. We give her this love by keeping the Commandments of her Son, by practicing virtue, and by being faithful to the practice of our holy Faith. Very simply, we love Our Lady by imitating her, by living the motto of Teresita Quevedo: “My Mother, grant that everyone who looks at me may see you!” This we do by giving a perfect effort to be as like to our heavenly Mother as possible in all things. In other words, we give a perfect effort for her sake in everything we do—a perfect effort in facing the difficulties of our state in life with patience, a perfect effort in bearing our sufferings and sorrows with resignation for the love of God, a perfect effort in imitating Our Lady in all the events and circumstances of our lives.

To give a perfect effort, as you may recall from the first article in this series, means to give one hundred



-Eyes of Our Lady on the Tilma.

In the left picture can be seen the image of the bearded Juan Diego; in the right, an outline of multiple people.



percent in all things at all times. It does not matter how we feel, it does not matter if we enjoy what we are doing, it does not even matter how insignificant the task is. All that matters is that we do our best for the love of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We can then leave the rest in her immaculate hands, confident that she will supply for our imperfections.

Throughout *The Perfect Effort* series, we have considered various feasts and apparitions of Our Lady so that we might learn from her holy example and direction how to increase our love for God and grow in the practice of virtue. If, then, we strive to learn from Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of La Salette, Our Lady of the Pillar, and Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, we will surely make great strides towards the sanctity to which each of us is called. If we earnestly strive to imitate Our Lady's resignation at the Annunciation, her confidence during Our Divine Savior's Passion and Resurrection, and the compassion and consolation she showed in the lifetime

of Saint Monica, we will walk ever more closely the path she walked while on this earth. And if, in all the events of our lives, we wear the armor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and daily run to her, our Queen and our Perpetual Protectress, we will never be alone or devoid of her protection.

In a word, if we follow the Blessed Virgin Mary's lead as Juan Diego did—if we are faithful to her as he was—she will impress her image upon the tilma of our souls as she once impressed it upon Juan's tilma. All who look upon us will see her. And, at our judgment, Our Divine Savior, seeing the image of His Mother, will admit us into the eternal bliss of heaven. Let us so live, then, that on that most glorious day when we see our Blessed Mother in heaven, we may run to her, lovingly embrace her, and whisper in her ear: "I gave a perfect effort in all things for you."



Teresita Quevedo

*"My Mother,
grant that everyone
who looks at me
may see you!"*

~ Teresita Quevedo

