



The Armor of Faith
Topic Summary: Miracles and Faith
Our Lady of Guadalupe



Our Lady of Guadalupe
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Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by my panel: [names]

Helen is a Dominican, which is also known as the Order of Preachers, and she is engaged in youth catechesis and music ministry at Saint Philip Benizi Catholic Mission in Cedaredge, Colorado. Sharon is our token cradle Catholic, and I am simply here to ask questions, because it is so much easier to ask questions than to have to actually answer them. That burden goes to our panelists, so welcome to our panelists as well as to our listeners.

Let us open with a prayer:

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray.

Discussion:

Last time, we discussed the story of the man born blind as recounted in John 9. Of all the miracle stories in the bible, the man born blind is unique in how the story presents a variety of

perspectives of those who experienced, witnessed, and heard about the event third hand. The story presented to us:

Disciples – Faithful, but academic

Neighbors – Observing, bewildered and divided

Parents – Knowing but fearful, abstaining and looking for a way out of the controversy

Pharisees – Hearing, judging and rejecting

Man born blind – called, obeying, worshiping and thankful

I mentioned that if we look at our faith life, we might observe different moments in our journey where we could have had similar reactions as any of the roles I mentioned above. The question, though, is not about our past, but our future. What will enable us to see? What will guide the direction of our faith?

As I commented, we might be tempted to say, we would not have questioned. We might be tempted to say, such an event would only strengthen our faith, but again, our observation is perhaps with the blessing of hindsight; but as we look at our future, are we certain about our response if we heard of such a miracle in our day?

Of course, the miracles we have discussed so far are events of the Bible, so if we accept the Bible as the Word of God, then, we accept the accounts. But there are those who say, these are only stories, myths, or legends. Today, we will begin to discuss events which transpired centuries past biblical times. One such event is the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

As I conducted background research to support our discussion, I noted there are those who believe in the miracle and those who believe there is no evidence to support the miracle and those who believe the available evidence demonstrates the *tilma* which contains the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, is simply a fraud.

For centuries, the story and image has been credited as inspiration to the faithful and responsible for the conversion of many souls. It has also been the subject of considerable investigation and analysis, with those conducting the examinations coming to differing conclusions.

The story begins, according to oral tradition, on 9 December, 1531. An Indian peasant by the name of Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, was on his way to the church in Tlatelolco. As he was passing by the hill of Tepeyac, the Virgin Mary appeared to him. She told Juan that she wanted a temple built on the hill. She instructed Juan to go to the bishop and inform him of this desire. The Blessed Mother also told Juan that she would give her maternal love to and aid those who suffered.

Juan did as he was instructed and went to the palace of the bishop. There, after some pleading, he gained an audience with Bishop Zumárraga, who received Juan with some skepticism. He instructed Juan to come back at another time where the matter could be examined in more detail.

(Question 1: Let's put ourselves in the shoes of Bishop Zumárraga. What if a peasant came to us and related that he had seen the Virgin Mother and that she wanted him to inform us that she wanted a temple built in a certain place? **How might we react to such a situation?**)

Juan Diego went back to the hill of Tepeyac and spoke again with the Blessed Mother. Recognizing the credibility afforded an Indian peasant at the time, Juan asked the Virgin Mary to send another of greater reputation who might be believed as to the Blessed Mother's message. The Blessed Mother replied that Juan was chosen for this mission and that he was to return to the bishop.

Again, Juan returned to the palace of the bishop, and once more obtained an audience with the bishop. The Bishop Zumárraga replied that he could not honor such a request without a sign that the message was truly from the Mother of Christ.

At the same time, Juan was faced with caring for his uncle who was gravely ill. Juan traveled to find a priest to hear the last confession of his dying uncle. His journey would normally take him past the hill of Tepeyac, but fearing time, he thought it best to avoid the hill so he would not face the possibility of delay by Mary. None-the-less, Mary once more appeared to him. She understood Juan's concern for his uncle, so reassured Juan that she would protect his uncle and that Juan's uncle would not die. Indeed, the uncle returned to health as Juan spoke with the Queen of Heaven.

The Queen Mother instructed Juan to go to the top of the hill and gather the flowers he would find there. One would not expect to find roses growing on a rocky hill in the cold of December, but that is exactly what Juan was to discover. He gathered the roses as instructed and placed them in his *tilma*, which is a sort of cloak. He returned to the Virgin Mother, who took the roses in her hand and told Juan these would be the sign for the bishop.

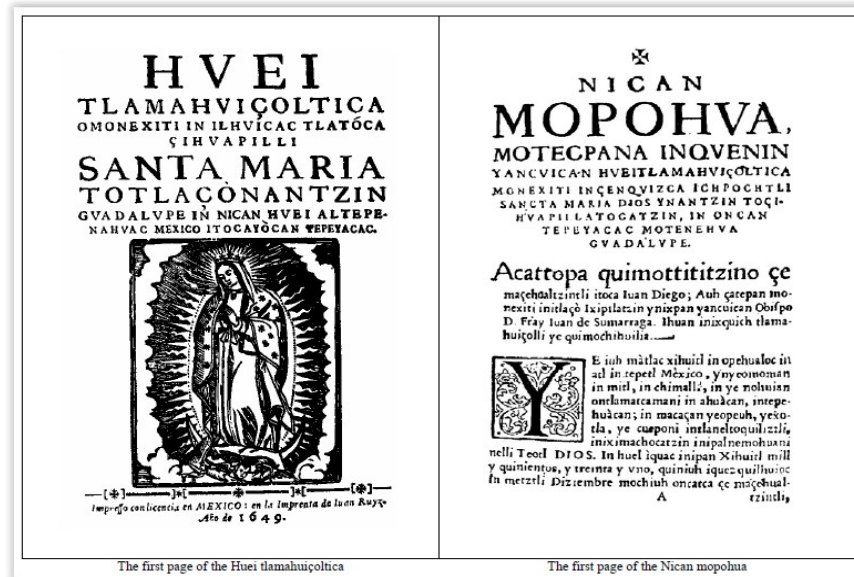
After the Blessed Mother returned the roses to the *tilma*, Juan did as he was instructed and returned to the bishop. Once more, after some interrogation by the bishop's staff, Juan gained another audience with the bishop. Juan related all that had happened and the gathering of the flowers. After telling the story, Juan opened his *tilma*, and as the flowers fell, the image of Our Lady was revealed on the *tilma*. The bishop fell to the floor in reverence of what he saw.

(Question 2: Once more, let's put ourselves in the shoes of the bishop. The peasant of whom we were skeptical returns. Now, keeping in mind that such roses are not of this region and are currently out of season, the peasant tells us of this miraculous story, then opens his cloak to reveal both the roses and the image of Our Lady. **How might we react to this situation?**)

While the story spread for many years through oral tradition, skeptics point to the lack of contemporary documentation behind the story. While the event was reported to have occurred in 1531, some historians indicate that the earliest written version of the story was published by Padre Miguel Sánchez in 1648, partially based on interviews of the elders. Skeptics further point to the fact that Bishop Zumárraga was a prolific writer, yet, there are no letters or writings of the bishop which reference Juan Diego or the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

(Question 3: So, the charge by some is that if an event was not reduced to historical writing, it didn't happen. From the perspective of our day and age, is this sufficient evidence to disprove the occurrence of a miracle?)

While my research was not exhaustive, by comparing criticisms of skeptics, I noted there is an apparently earlier written account, which, as indicated by the watermark on the paper, was written after 1556. According to one copy I found, the date was indicated as circa 1560. It is entitled, “Nican Mopohua (Here is Told);” written by the scholar Antonio Valeriano (1521-1605), but this work is also not without some controversy as to the actual author and date of publication. By some accounts, it was authored by Luis Lasso de la Vega in 1649.



(Question 4: When there is disagreement among the skeptics and those who endeavor to answer the skeptics, we are faced with a challenge as to who to believe. We also have the challenge of not having the actual evidence before us, therefore, we may lack information from which to validate or invalidate a given assertion. When we examine the analysis of others, to what should we look from which to assess our belief concerning the reports of a miracle?)

While written manuscripts may provide us information from which to assess an historical event, as we discussed, accuracy and veracity are sometimes difficult to discern. In the case of Our Lady of Guadalupe, however, there is some physical evidence which must be considered, which is the *tilma* upon which the image appears.

Unfortunately, here too is some controversy. According to one account, a trio of men; Leoncio A. Garza-Valdes, a San Antonio pediatrician, microbiologist, and amateur archaeologist; Gilberto Aguirre, a fellow physician, friend, and neighbor; and Lester Rosebrock, a medical and scientific photographer hired from the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio; went to Mexico City in 1999 to photograph the *tilma* using ultra-violet and infrared cameras. Their analysis of what they found, however, diverges. Garza-Valdes believes the photo reveals three separate images in different layers and concludes these were man made paintings with the original overpainted twice.

Aguirre, however, believes it is a flawed study in that the photographs were taken through protective Plexiglas, which may have given results misinterpreted by Garza-Valdes. Aguirre points out that infrared images can only detect the surface, not the subsurface, therefore, reflections caused by the Plexiglas could be the culprit for the results.

(Question 5: Of course, we do not have time here to go through all the scientific evidence and analysis associated with the *tilma*, but suffice it to say there is controversy. This could lead to the question, who am I to believe, the scientist or the scientist? Is scientific analysis foolproof?)

There are some assertions that Juan Diego is a mythical character. The assertion is there is no evidence he ever lived. This is somewhat related to our earlier discussion about no contemporary written accounts of the event. Some point out that Bishop Zumárraga never mentioned the name Juan Diego in his writings and that the name itself is like a John Doe of the the culture and time.

(Question 6: This is one of the dilemmas we face the farther back in time we go. Though 1531 was not exactly ancient times, it was still a relative frontier time of Mexican history. How do we go about proving whether someone lived or not during periods of limited and fragile record keeping?)

While examiners of the *tilma* have raised some doubts about the miraculous artifact, there are also some difficult things to explain. These include:

- The lack of brush marks
- Preservation over 500 years
 - A copy of the same material deteriorated after 15 years
 - For the first 116 years, it was unprotected by glass
 - It survived the unprotected adoration of 500 people in 1753
- Lack of damage from an accidental spill of nitric and hydrochloric acid
- Survival, without damage, of a bombing attempt
- Paint pigment of unknown origin
- The star constellations found on the robe of Our Lady appear the same as 1531
- The image presents a hieroglyphic story which the Aztecs understood
- The Spaniards observed imagery of a biblical nature

(Question 7: When someone raises doubt, there is usually someone who tries to remove the doubt. When the skeptic finds something which they cannot explain, the answer is, scientific study is not yet complete, but there is likely a logical explanation – no need for God to be involved. Is it possible to prove beyond a reasonable doubt all the details of distant history?)

The Internet places mountains of information at our fingertips, but there is also another problem. This is the difficulty of verifying authenticity of claims made in any given article. For example, some of the documents I found referred to a NASA study of the *tilma*, yet, no statement was found from NASA itself.

(**Question 8:** In our information age, the information pool is polluted with misinformation, disinformation, and outright lies and propaganda. How do we sort out the veracity of claims?)

(**Question 9:** As we discussed, we can read many reports, but they do not always contain the truth or information we can verify as truth. Is it possible that well meaning people present us with hoaxes as a means to convert us to faith? Is it possible that well meaning skeptics present us with information which distracts us from the truly miraculous?)

Quotes:

In fact, when the first missionaries who reached America from lands of eminent Marian tradition taught the rudiments of Christian faith, they also taught love for you, the Mother of Jesus and of all people. And ever since the time that the Indian Juan Diego spoke of the sweet Lady of Tepeyac, you, Mother of Guadalupe, have entered decisively into the Christian life of the people of Mexico.

– *Saint John Paul II*

“The Guadalupe Event,” as the Mexican Episcopate has pointed out, “meant the beginning of evangelization with a vitality that surpassed all expectations. Christ’s message, through his Mother, took up the central elements of the indigenous culture, purified them and gave them the definitive sense of salvation.” Consequently, Guadalupe and Juan Diego have a deep ecclesial and missionary meaning and are a model of perfectly inculturated evangelization.

– *Saint John Paul II*

I am truly your merciful Mother, yours and all the people who live united in this land and of all the other people of different ancestries, my lovers, who love me, those who seek me, those who trust in me. Here I will hear their weeping, their complaints and heal all their sorrows, hardships and sufferings.

– *Our Lady of Guadalupe*

Final Thoughts:

For years, I have seen the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, but I never examined the full story behind it. I have known it as among the Marian Apparitions approved by the Catholic Church. As I began research to support this segment of our show, I was not prepared for the controversy which surrounds the story of Juan Diego or the *tilma* with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, but then, neither should I be surprised at the efforts to sow doubt.

Given that all the reporting I browsed through was third hand accounts, I found authentication and veracity impossible. To add to the challenge, I was unable to locate Vatican documents which might help in my quest for validation because every time I attempted to use the search feature of the Vatican web site, I received an error indicating the search function was not working, so I apologize for the lack of church documents to support our discussion. Deadlines and technology sometimes leave us in the lurch.

Still, despite the skepticism, a key question is how has something so beautiful and fragile survived all these years with such lack of deterioration. It is a struggle for museums to preserve

historical artifacts from the many causes of deterioration, yet, this *tilma*, despite years without protection, remains before us. If not a miracle, it certainly presents many mysteries.

So, what does this mean to our faith? If we center our faith around a miracle, what happens when doubts as to the miracle are raised? Does this raise within us doubts about our faith? I would offer that miracles are a part of our faith, but if we recognize the ways God works within our lives, we will find our faith is not dependent upon miracles, rather, it is dependent upon our relationship with God.

Wrap Up: Well, another hour is gone. We hope you will be able to join us next week as we continue our discussion of miracles and faith with another Marian Apparition which brought to us the Miraculous Medal.

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: Miracles and Faith – Part V: Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

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