



## *The Armor of Faith*

**Topic Summary: Miracles and Faith**  
**Part V: The Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe**



*Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe*  
*Public Domain*

### **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 lay-Dominican, which is also known as the Order of Preachers, and she, along with her husband, Dan, are engaged in youth catechesis and music ministry at Saint Philip Benizi Catholic Mission in Cedaredge, Colorado. Sharon is our token cradle Catholic, and as everyone knows, I am simply here to ask questions. The burden of actual answers 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:**

As we concluded our last episode, I mentioned we would talk this week about the Miraculous Medal, however, if you remember, Sharon had suggested we spend some time reviewing the symbolism within the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Of course, I know better than to ignore the suggestions of my lovely wife, so, we will get to the Miraculous Medal next week. In the mean time, we did a little more research about the image.

One thing I should point out is that there is some controversy as to what the original image was which was seen by Bishop Zumárraga. This is because that infrared examination of the image reveals evidence that some embellishments were made to the image, which are beginning to demonstrate signs of deterioration. Still, the original image remains difficult to explain.

One scientific analysis conducted by Dr. Philip Serna Callahan, a biophysicist at the University of Florida, an expert in infrared photography, and who is also a painter; conducted an analysis in 1979. (Sennott) The conclusions were that, “The original figure, including the rose robe, blue mantle, hands and face ... is inexplicable. In terms of this infrared study, there is no way to explain either the kind of color luminosity and brightness of pigments over the centuries. Furthermore, when consideration is given to the fact that there is no underdrawing, sizing, or over-varnish, and the weave of the fabric is itself utilized to give portrait depth, no explanation of the portrait is possible by infrared techniques. It is remarkable that after more than four centuries there is no fading or cracking of the original figure on any portion of the agave tilma, which—being unsized—should have deteriorated centuries ago.”

Dr. Callahan also concludes that there are some embellishments added by human hands, probably during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Others, however, point out that copies made near the time of the apparition illustrate detail that Callahan attributed to the embellishments, but if the detail was an embellishment, it must have been added prior to 1570, and according to one account concerning a codex maintained by the Aztecs, possibly the same year as the apparition.

**(Question 1:** Critics would point out that embellishments negate the possibility of a miracle because the work was attributed to human hands. Still, Dr. Callahan's analysis is that the original portion of the image has no human hand explanation. **If there were embellishments, does this negate the possibility of a miracle?**)

According to one analysis, the Aztecs were a hieroglyphic culture, therefore, they viewed the image of our Lady of Guadalupe as a hieroglyphic letter of sorts. (Carpenter) They noted that the image of Our Lady was in front of the sun, which they interpreted as Mary as greater than the sun god they worshiped. They also interpreted the crescent beneath her feet as an indication

that their moon god was “less than nothing” because she was standing on it. The Aztecs also interpreted that Our Lady was not of this world because of the young angel beneath her holding her up with two arms. They also noted the brooch at her throat had a small black cross in the center, which they interpreted as the emblem of the Spanish Friars. This was also interpreted as meaning there was One greater than she. (Carpenter)

**(Question 2:** According to Dr. Callahan, some of these elements of the image were possibly embellishments added by human hand, which may have included: the moon and the tassel, the gold and black decorations, the angel, the fold in robe, the sunburst, and the background. (Sennot) **What might this reveal to us about the nature of the image and what it inspired?)**

From the perspective of the Spaniards, they noted biblical symbolism within the image. Beginning with the luminous light surrounding the Blessed Mother, it reminded them of the “woman clothed with the sun” referenced in Revelation 12:1. Let's take a look at this scripture.

(Revelation 12:1-12)

*1 [A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 2 She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. 4 Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. 6 The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God, that there she might be taken care of for twelve hundred and sixty days.*

*7 Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, 8 but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it.*

*10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:*

*“Now have salvation and power come,  
and the kingdom of our God  
and the authority of his Anointed.*

*For the accuser of our brothers is cast out,  
who accuses them before our God day and night.*

*11 They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
love for life did not deter them from death.*

*12 Therefore, rejoice, you heavens,  
and you who dwell in them.*

*But woe to you, earth and sea,  
for the Devil has come down to you in great fury,  
for he knows he has but a short time.”*

**(Question 3: As we reflect on Revelation 12:1-12, we see reference to a woman, her child, and a huge red dragon. What do we see within this imagery and why might this capture the attention of the Spaniards?)**

According to Jimmy Akin, a contributor to Catholic Answers Magazine, the woman “has four referents: Israel, the Church, Eve, and Mary.” (Akin)

Akin states, “She is Israel because she is associated with the sun, the moon, and twelve stars. These symbols are drawn from Genesis 37:9–11, in which the patriarch Joseph has a dream of the sun and moon (symbolizing his father and mother) and stars (representing his brothers), which bow down to him. Taken together, the sun, moon, and twelve stars symbolize the people of Israel.”

Akin also points out that “The Woman is the Church because, as 12:17 tells us, ‘the rest of her offspring’ are those who bear witness to Jesus, making them Christians.”

Akin denotes that, “The Woman is Eve because she is part of the three-way conflict also involving her Seed and the Dragon, who is identified with the ancient serpent (the one from Eden) in 20:2. This mirrors the conflict in Genesis 3:15 between Eve, the serpent, and her unborn seed—which in turn is a symbol of the conflict between Mary, Satan, and Jesus.”

(Genesis 3:15)

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
They will strike at your head,  
while you strike at their heel.*

Finally, Akin related, “[T]he Woman is Mary because she is the mother of Jesus, the child who will rule the nations with a rod of iron ([Revelation] 19:11–16).”

Aikin continues to explain, “Because the Woman is a four-way symbol, different aspects of the narrative apply to different referents. Like Mary, she is pictured as being in heaven and she flies (mirroring Mary’s Assumption). Like the Church, she is persecuted by the Devil after the Ascension of Christ. Like Israel, she experiences great trauma as the Messiah is brought forth (figuratively) from the nation. And like Eve, it is her (distant) seed with which the serpent has his primary conflict.”

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An explanation of the imagery provided by Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church of Austin Texas, noted that, “The Lady is standing upon the moon. Again, the symbolism is that of the woman of Rev. 12:1 who has the ‘moon under her feet’. ... in Christian iconography the crescent moon under the Madonna’s feet is usually a symbol of her perpetual virginity, and sometimes it can refer to her Immaculate Conception or Assumption.” It was also noted that, “The angel supporting the Lady testifies to her royalty.” It is also noted that the color of Mary's mantle

(blue-green or turquoise) are the colors of nobility for the Aztecs, as well as the colors of the “natural forces of life and fecundity.” From Jewish culture, the color blue was used for the robe of the high priest and the gold border is another sign of nobility. The explanation also notes, “The angel is transporting the Lady to the people as a sign that a new age has come.”

**(Question 4:** As noted, the angel supporting Our Lady and the colors of her mantel testifies to her royalty. It is also interpreted as a sign that a new age has come. **What might this new age be as viewed by the Aztecs and the Spaniards?)**

**(Question 5:** The stars on Our Lady's mantel indicates she comes from heaven. Combined with the imagery of nobility, this would indicated Our Lady is of the royalty of heaven. **How is it that Mary would be considered royalty in Heaven? What might be the nature of this royalty?)**

The explanation published by the Austin Texas parish continues, “The girdle or bow around her waist is a sign of her virginity... The high position of the bow and the slight swelling of the abdomen show that the Lady is "with child". According to Dr. Carlos Fernández Del Castillo, a leading Mexican obstetrician, the Lady appears almost ready to give birth with the infant head down resting vertically. This would further solidify her identification with the woman of Rev. 12 who is about to give birth.”

**(Question 6:** At first glance, we might not notice that the woman in the image is with child, but as you look at the bow beneath her hands and the arc of her belt, her condition becomes apparent. **Why might Our Lady appear in this condition?)**

As we look at the image, the eyes of the woman are looking down. This was significant to the Aztecs in that images of their gods would have eyes staring forward. This meant that the woman in the image was not a god. We also observe rays of the sun coming from behind her, therefore she is eclipsing the sun.

**(Question 7:** When we consider these two elements together, we might see a message of sorts. **What might this message be?)**

As I mentioned earlier, the colors within the mantel of Our Lady carried a meaning of “natural forces of life and fecundity” for the Aztecs. We also know the Aztec culture was one of human sacrifice.

**(Question 8:** For the Aztecs, who were essentially a culture of death, we might see another message. **What might this message be?)**

## Quotes:

*(Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego)*

Listen, put it into your heart, my youngest and dearest son, that the thing that disturbs you, the thing that afflicts you, is nothing. Do not let your countenance, your heart be disturbed. Do not fear this sickness of your uncle or any other sickness, nor anything that is sharp or hurtful. Am I not here, I, who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do

you need anything more? Let nothing else worry you, disturb you. Do not let your uncle's illness worry you, because he will not die now. You may be certain that he is already well.

*(Prayer of Saint John Paul II)*

Virgin of Guadalupe

Mother of the Americas...

grant to our homes the grace of loving and respecting life in its beginnings, with the same love which you conceived in your womb the life of the Son of God.

Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Fair Love, protect our families, so that they may always be united, and bless the upbringing of our children.

We beg you grant us a great love for all the holy Sacraments, which are, as it were, the signs that your Son left us on earth.

Thus, Most Holy Mother, with the peace of God in our conscience, with our hearts free from evil and hatred, we will be able to bring to all true joy and true peace, which come to us from your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

*(Prayer of Pope Benedict XVI)*

Holy Mary, who under the advocacy of Our Lady of Guadalupe, are invoked as mother of the men and women of the Mexican nation and of Latin America, encouraged by the love you inspire in us, we again place our lives in your maternal hands. You who are present in the Vatican Gardens, reign in the hearts of all mothers of the world and in our hearts. With great hope, we come to you and trust in you.

## **Final Thoughts:**

As we look at the miracle of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we see a history which is difficult to explain. While some question the very existence of Saint Juan Diego, the image itself presents us with evidence which presents a mystery, for example, the lack of brush strokes, the inability to determine the pigment, the lack of pre-preparation required for a clear image to be painted on cloth, or the lack of varnish to preserve the intensity of the colors, yet they remain vivid. It is also difficult to explain how the image has lasted 500 years, when the material of the *tilma* is so fragile and commonly decomposes within about 15 years. This is even more remarkable given the image was not protected for the first 116 years and was exposed to the corrosive humidity of the region and other environmental abuses during that time.

Another mystery before us is the symbolism within the imagery which carried a message which the Aztecs observed, but is also consistent with the woman of Revelation 12. The miracle was

from a distant time and may have led to the conversion of thousands of indigenous people, but its inspiration has also carried forward through history, inspiring many during periods of persecution against the church Christ built upon Peter.

There may be questions as to the embellishments, but the mysteries of the image cannot be denied. Though we look to the past, we might also ask the question, what will the image mean to our future?

**Wrap Up:** Well, our time has come to an end. We hope you will be able to join us next week as we move to the story of 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 VI: The Miraculous Medal

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