

**Emblazoned on Heart and Bicep**  
**by Brother Christopher Posch, ofm**

Every time I attend Spanish mass at St. Elizabeth, Westover, MD, I notice José in the back row vested in a tank top muscle shirt--whether it's summer or winter--sporting the Our Lady of Guadalupe tattoo inscribed on his right arm.

One young laborer recalls a favorite childhood memory of a rotating Guadalupe night light spinning and blessing all sides of the room.

Many of our parishioners smuggle under thick Guadalupe wool blankets that are warm as in the womb.

Guadalupe is painted on neighborhood walls and emblazoned on bumper stickers, sweatshirts, baseball caps, belts, and wristwatches. She can be found hanging off rear view mirrors and mounted on living room walls, front doors, dashboards, and the sets of TV soap operas called *novelas*. Mexican *padrinos* (godparents) present gold Guadalupe chains to those being baptized, confirmed, or married. Unfurnished apartments of new immigrant laborers who dine sitting on plastic crates and sleep on floor mats often have only one decoration on walls that would be otherwise barren: an image of *La Madrecita*, sometimes a tiny prayer card mounted with scotch tape.

After making a formal pledge to Almighty God and Our Lady of Guadalupe called a *juramento*, thousands have left the slavery of alcohol and have become new creations, mending marriages that were on the rocks. Presenting a little Our Lady of Guadalupe prayer card to individuals in migrant camp dorms, trailer parks, hospital rooms, and prisons have evoked instant tears.

Over the years I have reflected over how can such a simple visitation be so powerful.

Clearly, Our Lady of Guadalupe appears in times that are not calm, in clouds of dust that are not particularly picturesque. She first appeared ten years after the brutal and bloody conquest of 1521. For the indigenous peoples, the conquest represented a total loss: their men were killed, their women were raped, their houses burned, and their temples destroyed. So they didn't want to live any more. Mexican-American theologian Fr. Virgil Elizondo describes this as a collective death wish. Perhaps reflecting on our pain and sense of loss after the tragic events of September 11, 2001 can begin to move us into solidarity with the survivors of the conquest.

But at this darkest moment in history, Our Lady chose to speak with

great tenderness to Juan Diego, "I want to be your mother. I want to be the mother of all the inhabitants of this land. I want to protect you."

Gabriela, a magnificent mother from Our Lady of Lourdes, Seaford, DE, ecstatically recalled a dream in which *Lupita*, a term of endearment, whispered in her ear, "*Soy como tú. Soy como tú.*" I'm just like you: *morenita* with olive skin; poor, clinging to God during hard times. One might say that as God became one of us by becoming human, Mary became Latina by visiting Tepeyak, dark-skinned and vested in humble indigenous attire. Such a realization bolsters faith, hope, and self-esteem.

As Guadalupe is a source of strength and consolation to the poorest of the poor in Latin America, she's a source of comfort to new Latino immigrants in our province and throughout the North, often working in conditions of slavery and longing for their home villages and to be awakened by church bells and roosters singing and the sounds of their mothers patting and shaping homemade tortillas.

Guadalupe also tenderly embraces the children of immigrants. Teenage parishioner Martín from St. Paul, Wilmington describes himself as "raised on Power Station and Power Rangers, rock and rap, *salsa* and *meringue*, and Our Lady of Guadalupe... The kids in school messed around with me. It's okay that my English isn't perfect and that I like hamburgers more than tacos. All *La Madre* asks of me is faith."

As I continue to ponder on the mystery of Guadalupe, I know that this reflection is incomplete. Perhaps the best advice to those who want to move towards comprehending Guadalupe is to see her with your own eyes. You may want to view thousands of pilgrims and well-known musicians venerating *La Madre* at the Guadalupe Basilica in Mexico City on Univision on December 11 from 11:00 PM until dawn. Or, better yet, attend live *Mañanitas* and Guadalupe masses at a nearby parish, and experience the faith and devotion of neighboring pilgrims who've come to greet *La Madre* on what is said to be her birthday with festive hymns accompanied by mariachis or local parish choirs. Enjoy the fragrance of the roses and the sights of children dressed in the attire of Juan Diego and indigenous women. Be moved by those in prayer, sometimes entering the church walking on their knees in gratitude or supplication, silently fixing their eyes upon *La Madre* in reverential silence.

The Church may be packed, but *La Madre's* lap is big enough to hold everyone. Her embrace can hold us all.