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Feature Story:

Relic of tilma of Guadalupe to be at Jubilee Celebration.

By Kathie Sass - Editor

Every year, millions of pilgrims trek to Mexico City to view a poor Indian's cloak bearing the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. And now, a piece of that cloak, called a tilma, is coming to Springfield to help celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Catholic diocese.

The Tilma of Tepeyac Tour will make available a relic of St. Juan Diego's tilma at the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois' day-long Jubilee Celebration on Saturday, June 28, at the Illinois State Fairgrounds.

On Sunday, June 29, the relic will also visit St. Alexius Parish in Beardstown. The weekend visit is part of a national tour, which began May 30 in Denver and will end in New York, where it will be on display Dec. 5-7. "We are fortunate to have been included on the national tour," said Father Thom Dennis, chair of the Jubilee Celebration. "Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patroness of the Americas and we are blessed that such a treasure will visit central Illinois as we celebrate our diocesan sesquicentennial."

During the June 28 Jubilee Celebration, the relic will be on display for public veneration from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in the Pilgrim's Passage area leading up to the Grandstand. The rosary will be prayed in Spanish at 1 p.m. and a Living Rosary, led by the Legion of Mary, will be prayed in English at 2 p.m.

Relics are personal remains and effects of saints. The relic coming to Springfield consists of a tiny rectangular piece of the saint's tilma. It is encased in a reliquary attached to a silver chain, which is draped over a 17th-century statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The cloth is surrounded by relics of other saints, including St. Francis Xavier and St. Teresa of Avila. The visit to the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is being sponsored by the Apostolate for Holy Relics, which is dedicated to increasing appreciation and understanding of relics and the saints associated with them.

The relic - likely the only one in the United States - is a small piece that was detached from the tilma and given to Archbishop John Cantwell of Los Angeles by the Archbishop of Mexico City, Luis Maria Martinez, in 1941. It has been in the archives of the L.A. Archdiocese under the care of Msgr. Francis Weber since 1981. The faithful believe that the image on the tilma, or cloak, of a poor Indian named Juan Diego was miraculously created by the Virgin Mary in 1531. The image, which continues to baffle scientists, is now the most recognizable religious symbol in Latin America, and devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe is a favorite of Catholics throughout the Americas.

St. Juan Diego was canonized July 31, 2002 in front of an enormous crowd of over 5 million people in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. Up to 20 million people visit the shrine in Mexico City annually, making it the most visited in the world.

The June 28 Jubilee Celebration is one of the high points of Jubilee 2003, the year-long celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the diocese.