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Relic of St. Juan Diego visits parish in Chicago

By **Jennifer Sladek**
Staff writer

A half-inch square of centuries-old cloth is travelling around the country this summer, a small reminder of one of the biggest devotional traditions in the Americas—the vision of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The cloth is a piece of St. Juan Diego's tilma, or cloak, on loan from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. It will be on display at Chicago's Our Lady of Tepeyac Parish July 25-26 as part of a tour organized by the Apostolate for Holy Relics. The tour began in May in Denver and will continue through December.

Canonized by Pope John Paul II just last year, Juan Diego is a new saint, but his story is old. Tradition holds that Diego was passing by Tepeyac Hill in today's Mexico City on his way to church in December 1531 when a vision of the Virgin Mary first appeared to him. She asked him to tell the local bishop she desired a church to be built at the base of the hill in her honor.

Diego obeyed, only to encounter an understandably skeptical bishop who put him off. When he returned the next day, the bishop asked Diego to bring a sign to convince him of the apparition.

Two days later, the Virgin appeared in a different spot, directing Diego to pick roses that were blooming nearby, despite the fact that it was December. Diego took the roses and, carrying them in his tilma, brought them to the bishop.

When Diego opened his tilma for the bishop, informing him that the Virgin had sent the requested sign, the bishop and other bystanders dropped to their knees, not because of the roses but because the tilma now bore an image of Mary. This famous image today is revered as Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe has long been popular among Hispanics, but in recent years has made strong movement across cultural lines.

That Juan Diego's tilma should survive today is a



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miracle in itself, since it is woven from plant fibers and should have disintegrated centuries ago. The tilma belongs to the Archdiocese of Mexico City, but in 1941 a small piece of the cloth was removed by Archbishop Luis Maria Martinez and given as a gift to Archbishop John Cantwell of Los Angeles. That half-inch square, stored in a locket and draped on a 17th century statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe, is the tilma relic on tour.

The relic will be available for veneration at Our Lady of Tepeyac, 2226 S. Whipple St., starting at 5 p.m. July 25. A procession through the neighborhood will start at 6 p.m. and Mass will follow. On July 26, Masses will be held at 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. and the church will be open during the day for veneration. For more information, call the parish at (773) 521-8400.

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