



### 'Rejoicing'

#### **Relic of St. Juan Diego's cloak displayed at cathedral**

By MARY ANN POUST

With devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe growing beyond its traditional Mexican roots, a relic associated with the Virgin drew pilgrims from throughout the metropolitan area to St. Patrick's Cathedral during a weekend snowstorm Dec. 5-7 for veneration and prayer.

The relic, a small piece of St. Juan Diego's cloak, concluded a tour of the United States that began in May and ended with the visit to the cathedral.

Cardinal Egan received the relic at the cathedral in a ceremony Dec. 5, during which he carried it in a metal reliquary from the main sanctuary to a side altar, where a painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe is permanently on display.

The relic, encased in a locket, was removed from the reliquary and placed on a statue of the Blessed Mother amid vases full of red roses, while the Knights of Columbus in colorful regalia stood guard.

"We're beginning three days of rejoicing," the cardinal said, addressing the congregation and reporters at the morning ceremony.

The cardinal told those present that he had "the joy, the privilege and the honor" to have seen the original cloak, called a tilma, in Mexico City in July of 2002. He was there with Pope John Paul II for the canonization of Juan Diego, the Aztec peasant who had a vision of the Blessed Virgin in 1531 on Tepeyac Hill.

The Virgin came to be known as Our Lady of Guadalupe, who was declared by the pope in 2000 to be patroness not just of Mexico but of all of the Americas.

After Juan Diego's vision, he did her bidding by asking the local bishop to build a church in her honor. As proof of the apparition, Juan Diego's cloak is said to have been miraculously imprinted with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and filled with roses even though it was December.

The cardinal, noting in his remarks that New York is home to increasing numbers of Mexicans, said that the cathedral "will be greatly blessed" by those who come to "ask the mother of Jesus to care for us, to lead us and guide us in the path of her son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

The Friday morning ceremony was held under the forecast of a severe

snowstorm, but that didn't stop Jane Pacilio and Karen Cannavina from traveling to the cathedral from Patchogue on Long Island. "I have a great devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe," Ms. Pacilio said. "She reveals herself as a merciful mother. He was a peasant, and she said, 'I'm here to listen to your cries.' There's a tenderness there."

Napoleon De Ocampo of Yonkers, a native of the Philippines who attends the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe at St. Bernard's Church on West 14th Street in Manhattan, prayed silently in a pew before the relic.

"I have a special devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe," he said. "I lost my faith in the 90s and I came back because of her."

The storms that began later that day and lasted throughout the weekend undoubtedly kept down the crowds, but a devout group of pilgrims came on Saturday for a Mass celebrated by Rockville Centre Bishop William Murphy, followed by the Rosary and veneration of the relic.

The Mass was organized by the Respect Life ministries of Rockville Centre and the New York Archdiocese and Brooklyn Diocese. Mary Bossart, co-director of the ministry in Rockville Centre, said it was important for Respect Life offices to get involved, with one reason being the belief by some that the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe appears to be pregnant because of the way her sash is tied.

On Sunday, the cardinal was principal celebrant of a Mass in Spanish, for which the relic was moved from the side altar to the sanctuary. Greeting the congregation, he said, "The Church calls the Mexican people to be part of the new evangelization. We need more Mexicans to bring the message of Tepeyac."

Auxiliary Bishop Josu Iriondo, vicar for Hispanic Affairs and pastor of St. Anthony of Padua in the Bronx, challenged his listeners in a homily, saying, "Juan Diego changed the course of history in Mexico. Today, Mary calls you to follow and take part in that history...Juan Diego was the prophet who brought the message of love to so many people."

Later, Carlos Villamil of the Bronx spoke to CNY about the meaning of Our Lady of Guadalupe to him and his fellow Mexicans. "It's hard to describe a personal sentiment that is rooted in my heart," he said, "but it's just a special feeling to be here on this special day. It's really all just faith."

The tour of the relic was organized by the Apostolate for Holy Relics and co-sponsored by the Knights of Columbus. Family Rosary provided rosaries for the event.

The relic was on loan from the Los Angeles Archdiocese, and is likely the only one in the United States. It was returned to Los Angeles in time for the observance of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12.

Socrates Palmer Jr. contributed to this story.

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