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Local - The Arizona Daily Star

Saint's relic draws thousands

Fri Oct 31, 3:35 AM ET

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Stephanie Innes, ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Photos by Aaron J. Latham / Staff Devotees line up to kiss and touch the glass case containing a piece of the Tilma of Tepeyac, displayed in a necklace draped around a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church.

Catholics believe the relic - the small piece of cloth inside the circle - is from the cloak St. Juan Diego wore on Tepeyac Hill.

'Tilma of Tepeyac' exhibit • Information about the history behind the tilma relic is available at www.apostolateforholyrelics.com/. • Today the tilma relic will be transported from Tucson to Sacred Heart Parish, 272 N. Rodriguez St., Nogales, Ariz. Mass begins at 8 a.m. with a procession. Visitation will continue until 2:30 p.m., when a closing ceremony will be conducted and the relic will be transferred to Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary Church, 177 E. Eighth St., Florence. • Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tucson is scheduled to celebrate Mass in Florence at 7 p.m. tonight. • A full schedule of the Arizona tilma tour is available at www.diocesetucson.org/tilma.html Catholics flock to see tiny 'touch of heaven'

An end to the wildfires in California was the miracle that San Diego resident Katie Brown requested of a thumbnail-sized piece of cloth that drew more than 2,000 people to Tucson's South Side on Thursday.

After standing in line for about 30 minutes at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, 602 W. Ajo Way, Brown, 60, placed her hand on the glass case containing the relic, and prayed. The relic is a half-inch square of cloth that Catholics believe was part of a tilma - an Aztec word meaning a poncho-like cloak - worn by St. Juan Diego in 1531 when the humble Aztec peasant spoke to the Virgin Mary on Tepeyac Hill outside Mexico City.

"As a special intention I asked Mary to please stop the fires. I have faith she will," said Brown, who was visiting Tucson to get away from the smoke and ash near her home.

Brown said she went to St. John's to see the relic because her faith is the most important thing in her life. She brought along her video camera to record the special event. Catholics like Brown regard the



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cloak as a symbol of the miracle that occurred when Mary - La Virgen de Guadalupe - left her colorful image emblazoned on the cloak after appearing to Juan Diego and urged him to build a church in her honor at the base of Tepeyac Hill.

"People were oppressed and living a hard life and God heard their prayers," said the Rev. Ray Ratzenberger of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Benson, who brought a group of 10 parishioners to see the tiny swatch. "The Virgen came to the poor and downcast. She's the one who really evangelized Mexico. It's like a touch of heaven."

Organizers say the Tilma of Tepeyac's 18-city tour, which includes six stops in Arizona, will be the only time it will be displayed outside its permanent home in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The swatch was a gift from the Mexico City archbishop to Los Angeles Archbishop John J. Cantwell in 1941.

Rebecca Aaron J. Latham / Staff
Sharer, 56, cried parishioner at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, prays during Mass for the Tilma of Tepeyac. as she waited in line to see the relic.

"My sister and I were just in our car and we were looking for Church's Chicken. My niece called and told us about the tilma and I was overwhelmed," said Sharer, who immediately redirected her car toward St. John's. "It's a miracle that it's here. It's such a historical moment."

Eight-year-old Pablo Monreal, a third-grader at St. John's, portrayed St. Juan Diego by wearing a recreation of the tilma the saint is believed to have worn nearly 500 years ago.

Juan Diego provided proof of his visions when he gave the bishop of Mexico City his tilma bearing the image of the Virgin Mary. The tilma was filled with roses in full bloom even though it was winter. Pope John Paul ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) II canonized Juan Diego in Mexico City in 2002 in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, where millions of people have made pilgrimages to see the tilma.

Many of those at St. John's on Thursday had already seen the tilma in the basilica in Mexico City, but said they were pleased to see the smaller relic at such a close range. In Mexico City, visitors must view the tilma from a distance on a moving

At St. John's on Thursday, a shrine containing statues of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego was decorated with paper roses. Several vendors sold T-shirts, rosaries and medallions. Although the tilma belonged to St. Juan Diego, it was the Virgin of Guadalupe about whom most of the faithful spoke. Many people pressed rosaries and small statues to the glass case containing the relic, saying prayers to the Virgin.

"She's the mother of hope and hope is her son," said Adolfo Corzo of the Los Angeles-based Apostolate for Holy Relics, which co-sponsored the Tilma of Tepeyac tour through Arizona along with the Knights of Columbus.

"She's a mother to all of us. I run to her because my

sidewalk, they said. mom has passed on," said Leilani Gomez, the owner of Leilani's Shear Creations, 5337 S. 12th Ave. She came to St. John's on her lunch hour with co-worker Cynthia Rodriguez to see the relic, and began crying after visiting it. "It's part of our culture, our tradition. And it's an opportunity for us to see the actual tilma."

At the time of his canonization, some said they doubted Juan Diego's existence. Gomez and Rodriguez brought medals and rosaries to the church to hold up to the glass box holding the tilma relic. Gomez, who is in her 40s, prayed for her sister, who is about to undergo a kidney transplant, and for her niece, who is losing her vision due to diabetes.

Others say the tilma is actually just a painting. But for the devout who were at St. John's and then at nearby Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Parish to view the tilma swatch, there are no doubts about the power of a tiny speck of material.

"Catholics are sacramental. God uses physical things for us to see and touch and smell," said Ratzenberger, the priest from Benson. "It's a sign that God is watching over us. It connects us to heaven, to God's mercy. Even when there is suffering, God is there."

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