

SAINTS ALIVE! DECEMBER 9: SAINT JUAN DIEGO



The most recognized bridge in the United States is the Golden Gate Bridge. This breathtaking inspiration of human engineering and aesthetic celebration is the tourist attraction for visitors to San Francisco.

The most famous bridge in the world is the Ponte Vecchio. In Florence, Italy, the Ponte Vecchio was the only bridge intentionally spared by bombing during the German retreat of August 1944.

The most famous bridge in our Catholic faith is the Pope. Ponte is Italian for bridge. The leader of the Catholic Church, the Pope, is *the* pontiff. He is responsible for building bridges across religions and all people to create a just peace that is the Kingdom of God.

Bridges unite cultures, economies and neighbors. They are feats of difficult engineering. Building bridges between opposites – opposing points of views, different peoples – is equally difficult. To bridge relationships means overcoming the gap between two sides, be it a narrow separation of misunderstanding or a wide chasm of antipathy.

Walls isolate, separate and perpetuate the myth of “us” versus “them.”

The most famous wall in the world is The Great Wall of China. Built more than 2000 years ago, it was built to protect China from invaders.

The most famous wall of our times is the Berlin Wall. Like most walls, it was built not to protect but to separate West Berlin from East Germany.

Here in America we have the Mexico-United States border wall. Its proponents espouse the need for the border wall to protect American citizens from drugs, crime and

I recently visited Nogales, Arizona and its border town, Nogales, Mexico. Proponents are right about the need for a border wall to stem the tide of drugs and crime because in Nogales I saw the pervasive fix from the drug of optimism for a better life that America offers. I witnessed the crime of poverty exacerbated by NAFTA and the U.S. factories where the owners and managers stealing the dignity of Mexican workers.

Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez was a 16 year-old walking along the Nogales, Mexico side of the border wall one early morning in October, 2012. He was shot at least seven times from behind; thirteen bullet holes scar the building behind him during the shooting. At least five of the shots into Elena Rodriguez's back must have hit him while he was lying on the sidewalk.

Rodriguez was suspected of throwing rocks at U.S. Border Patrol agents, which meant flinging rocks at least 20 feet up in the air if they hoped to crest the top of the border wall. The United States government has built a wall of silence around this tragedy.

Walls keep “them” away from “us.”

Juan Diego was a peasant from Mexico who had a vision of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe. One can imagine a modern Juan Diego irritatingly persistent with his message that a church in the Virgin Mary's honor be built at the site where he encountered her, forcing himself upon others with a cloak of roses (a sign from Mary), being shot for his boldness and lack of respect for authority.

In the end, the finest bridges are those we build ourselves – to overcome the misunderstanding and prejudices that we harbor – within our families, our neighborhoods, our cities or our parishes. Bridges are invitations to cross over.

Saint Juan Diego, patron saint of humility, you faced the skepticism and rejection of a bishop and the crowds to bring Mary's message to Mexico. Pray for us that when we are faced with walls impeding our faith we may show that same courage and commitment. Amen.



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