

Diocesan Celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe

December 11, 2015 7:00 p.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

(Rev. 11:19;12:1-6,10; Lk.1:39-47)

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ! Feliz Fiesta!!!

This is one of the most special Feasts of the entire year and every time we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, our hearts are filled with joy. But why are we joyful? The most important reason we should be rejoicing on this Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is for the very same reason why we, as people of faith, should be filled with joy always: Because God loves us---because God has chosen us to be His Children---and because, in spite of our sins, our God wants to be with us---to forgive us---and to show us His mercy!

On this Feast, we focus our attention on two human beings: Mary---a very young teenager; and Juan Diego, an older man. Two people, very much like us, and both of whom were given very challenging missions.

We just heard about young Mary's mission in the Gospel passage about the Annunciation. The Archangel Gabriel appears to Mary and greets her with that beautiful prayer: "*Hail (Mary--- You are) full of grace. The Lord is with you!*" St. Luke doesn't tell us what Mary said, but he does tell us how she felt---"*She was deeply troubled....and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.*"

Can you imagine what that would be like? To have an Archangel appear to you and tell you that the Lord God Almighty was with you?

But what Gabriel went on to say was even more incredible. He began by saying: "*Do not be afraid Mary....You have found favor with God!*" And then he went on to tell her that she would become pregnant with a Son, Whom she was to name "Jesus". And not only that, but that this Son would be "*great*"---and would become known as "*Son of the most High.*" That the "*Lord God will give Him the throne of David his father...and that the Kingdom He would inherit would have no end!*" Mary was not only troubled, but also confused, and she asked: "*How can this be?*" Gabriel explained that this would all take place through the power of the Holy Spirit. At that point, even though Mary didn't understand everything, she realized that she was being asked to

surrender herself completely to God's Will, and to embrace this whole new challenge---this mission of bringing God's Son into the world as her own Son---as **God's Son's Mother!** While it didn't make sense, Mary's joyful response was: "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your Word.*"

Fifteen centuries later---in 1531---in Tepeyac, Mexico, a holy Aztec man named Juan Diego was walking 15 miles from his village to Mexico City to go to daily Mass, when all of a sudden, a young teenage Aztec girl appeared to Juan Diego. He realized that this young maiden was the Virgin Mary. She gave him a very challenging mission: she asked him to go to the Bishop to ask him to build a Church on the hills of Tepeyac. Juan did exactly as he was told and saw the Bishop. But the Bishop wanted Juan to ask the Virgin for some proof. Several more times over the next two days, Mary appeared to Juan, and during her 4th visit, Mary tried to reassure Juan by asking him: "Am I not here, who is your Mother? Are you not under my protection? What else do you wish?" Then Mary asked Juan to go and collect some roses, which normally would not have been blooming in that winter time. Juan gathered the roses and kept them protected inside his tilma. When he got to see the Bishop the second time to give him the proof he asked for, the roses had been replaced by the beautiful image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Two human beings were both asked to do something challenging. They were both concerned, and worried; but they also both trusted completely in God's love for them, and therefore, they were not only able to do what had been asked of them, but they carried out their mission with joy! The Archangel Gabriel assured Mary that she was "full of grace" and that "the Lord is with you". And Our Lady of Guadalupe assured Juan Diego that she was right there with him---that she was his Mother and that she would be his protection. Both of them trusted completely in God's love for them, and it was their trust that gave them the cause for their joy.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, Our Lady of Guadalupe asked Juan Diego to have the Bishop build a Church so that the people of Mexico would see that God was with them through the presence of the Church. And Our Lady's primary and complete attention, as always, is given to helping to bring us---her children---close to Jesus, her Son and our Brother---by staying close to the Church.

This year as we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we have just begun the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy which Pope Francis has called all of us to observe throughout this coming year.

All of us need to remember that our God loves us unconditionally. There's nothing we can do---no sin that we can commit that's so big, or so bad, that God won't forgive us. Forgiveness is always more powerful than punishment.

The whole reason why we are preparing to celebrate Christmas is to celebrate the birth of Jesus. And why did God send His only-begotten Son into the world? So that Jesus could "be God with us" (Emmanuel) and so that Jesus could bring us forgiveness for our sins.

Our Blessed Mother and St. Juan Diego---two human beings just like us---were both asked to take on significant, difficult missions in this life. They both joyfully fulfilled their mission because they surrendered themselves to God and trusted in God's love and mercy. The result was that they were filled with joy.

We too are asked to take on important missions in our lives. We are called to be people of faith---to be followers of Jesus---to be strong and active Catholics---to be people who also surrender ourselves to live our lives according to God's ways and to live our faith with joy. That too is a difficult challenge, but the way we can be faithful to what God asks us to do is to do the same things as Our Blessed Mother and St. Juan Diego did: trust in God completely; and let our hearts be filled with Joy knowing that God is always with us, as long as we stay close to Him in the Church and through Our Lady of Guadalupe.

God bless you, now and always!