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Sunday, September 12

Our Lady of Guadalupe of Los Angeles Los Angeles, California

Millions know about and are devoted to the miraculous image of Our Lady which she left imprinted on St. Juan Diego's cloak in Mexico in 1531. Less well known, there is another image of Our Lady in Los Angeles, California, which contains a relic of Juan Diego's tilma. The relic, the only known segment ever detached from the original tilma, is draped over a 17th century statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Monsignor Francis Weber, the archivist for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, received the statue from Father Brian Kane in 1964. Carved from wood and coated with gesso, the 21: tall image is painted in traditional colors and finished with gold and silver highlights.

In mid-1941, the Apostolic Delegate to Mexico invited Archbishop John J. Cantwell to make a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Guadalupe near Mexico City. The visit would be a compliment to the Catholics of a country that had sent so many of its children to California, especially during the then-recent persecutions of the Church in Mexico.

The Archbishop and his party were welcomed by a military delegation representing the President of Mexico, and the entire diplomatic corps. A solemn pontifical mass was celebrated at the shrine on October 12, 1941.

Archbishop Cantwell observed that the missions built in California are our title deeds to show to the newcomers that we of the Old Church are in California by right of inheritance, and concluded his speech by praying that the traditions that made Mexico distinguished and honorable in the past may be perpetuated in a fuller measure in years to come, and that the glory of the days gone by may be surpassed by the pledge of the future. The Archbishop's speech was broadcast over the National Broadcasting System from Mexico. And his visit marked a thawing in the delicate relations then existing between the Church and state in Mexico.

After Cantwell returned to Los Angeles, Archbishop Luis Maria Martinez of Mexico City proposed to the canons of the Basilica in Mexico that an appropriate way to commemorate the Los Angeles Archbishop's visit would be to present him a relic of the tilma. At the time, Los Angeles had a larger Mexican population than any city in the world outside of Mexico City. The canons agreed and a small rectangular piece of the



tilma was encased in a silver reliquary and taken to Los Angeles. Archbishop Cantwell received the relic with great devotion.

The relic of the tilma forms a tie to California's Catholic history. Fray Francisco Garcia Diego y Moreno, the first bishop of Ambas Californias, was ordained in Mexico in 1840, under the miraculous portrait of Our Lady.

The Archbishop entrusted the relic to Father Fidencia Esparza, a Mexican-born priest from Guadalajara who was active among the Hispanic community in the Los Angeles area. Late in 1981, Cardinal Timothy Manning headed a pilgrimage to Mexico's Basilica of Guadalupe. On his return, then Monsignor Esparza confided the relic to the Cardinal. It was placed on display in the historical museum attached to the Los Angeles Archival Center. The statue of Our Lady seemed to be a match with the reliquary, which was draped around her neck.

In 2003, a non-profit apostolate organized a tour of the Los Angeles image and relic which traveled to 21 venues across the United States. The image, holding around its neck the precious relic, was publicly venerated by over 150,000 of the faithful, including twenty five Bishops, and six Cardinals. Today, the lovely little image of Our Lady and her precious relic of St. Juan Diego's tilma are on permanent display in the new Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, California.

The Mother of the Americas is a perfect description of this representation of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Although the likeness is particular to the Indigenous of Mexico she stands as a Mother to all and for all. This became very apparent during the 'Tilma of Tepeyac' tour of 2003. I will always remember that this statue and relic seemed to create a renaissance within the Catholic Church across America.

- Tom Serafin ñ

Tom Serafin is a professional photographer in Los Angeles, California, and is the president of a lay apostolate to promote the proper veneration of relics. Serafin is the author of the book Relics, the Forgotten Sacramental.

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