

Archbishop Lori presides at archdiocesan celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe

WESTMINSTER - Close to 500 people weathered a steady snowfall the evening of Dec. 9 to participate in the archdiocesan celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe at St. John Church.

Archbishop William E. Lori was the principal celebrant during the Mass that kicked off the event at 7 p.m. Pastor Father Mark Bialek and associate pastor Father Christopher de León concelebrated. Preaching in Spanish to a predominant Latino congregation, Archbishop Lori expressed joy for the opportunity to pay honor in their native language to the Mother of God, under the title of “Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.”

“On this Second Sunday of Advent, we also celebrate the anniversary of the first apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe,” the archbishop said in his homily. “The story of Our Lady of Guadalupe is at the same time familiar, yet awe-inspiring.”

The archbishop noted that on the morning of Dec. 9, 1531, a young peasant named Juan Diego had a vision of a young maiden on Tepeyac Hill, south-central Mexico. Mary was dressed as an Aztec princess, and speaking in the native dialect, the archbishop said, and she asked that a church honoring her be built on that hill. By her words, Juan Diego realized that it was the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Archbishop Lori retold the whole Guadalupe account during his homily, including when St. Juan Diego shared his vision with the local bishop, Juan de Zumárraga. The local ordinary asked the young peasant to ask the young lady for a miraculous sign that it was from God. Mary asked Juan Diego to gather some roses from Tepeyac Hill, and then take them to Bishop Zumárraga.

Because it was winter then and flowers were out of season, Juan Diego was perplexed by Our Lady’s request, but he nevertheless obeyed.

“When he reached the hilltop, he found beautiful Castilian roses in full bloom,” Archbishop Lori said. “The Virgin Mary herself arranged them in his tilma, a peasant cloak made of plant fibers. When Juan Diego opened the cloak before Bishop Zumárraga, the roses fell to the floor, and in their place, the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, an image not painted by human hands, was supernaturally imprinted onto the fabric.”

To this day, the tilma of Juan Diego is enshrined at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe near Mexico City, he added, and has been visited by “untold millions” of people over five centuries.

The main message of Guadalupe, said Archbishop Lori, is that “Mary always leads us to Jesus.”

“Mary led a whole people, a whole continent, to Jesus. Her coming as Our Lady of Guadalupe began an evangelization that brought millions of souls to Christ, and which continues to this day,” he added.

At the conclusion of Mass, a young Latino family carried a statue of Our Lady Guadalupe mounted on a small ark to the parish hall. Knights of Columbus on full regalia stood guard as the Virgin statue made her way to the hall where she was welcomed by a Mariachi quartet who greeted her with “Las Mañanitas,” a Mexican folk song typically sung in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The celebration continued at the parish hall where participants enjoyed Mexican folk dancing and a colorful dinner of Mexican and Central American food.

Lia Salinas, archdiocesan director of Hispanic Ministry, expressed gratitude for the Archbishop Lori’s presence during the event.

“It’s a wonderful thing that the archbishop is able to accompany the community,” she said. “He is the shepherd of our archdiocese, so it’s very important that he comes and celebrates with us, especially for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe – the patroness of the Americas.”

Selvin Escovar, a parishioner of St. John and part of the event’s organizing team, described the Mass with Archbishop Lori as “Hermomisisima” (Spanish for the most

beautiful). “It was a very concrete way to show the high level of interest the archdiocese has for our Hispanic community,” Escovar said.

Although Father Bialek said the snowfall that evening played a major role in the limited attendance at the archdiocesan event, he praised the devotion of all the participants.

“For those who were brave enough to go out in the cold and the snow, we were very much glad to have them with us,” he said. The pastor also pointed out Our Lady’s role of bringing together people of all cultures into one parish.

“Our Lady of Guadalupe truly brings us together as one family. She unites the Americas; she unites all peoples. And very much so, she is uniting our community, both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking.”

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*For a Spanish version of this story, click **here**.*