

# Archdiocese of Baltimore celebrates Our Lady of Guadalupe

Pews at Sacred Heart of Jesus-Sagrado Corazón de Jesús in Highlandtown were packed with faithful eager to celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe Dec. 9.

The predominantly-Hispanic congregation clapped along to a vibrant opening procession, which included traditional dress and dancing. New statues depicting Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Juan Diego kneeling at her feet were carried in and placed beneath the altar. Donated by parishioners, the images were blessed at the end of Mass by Archbishop William E. Lori.

Archbishop Lori delivered the homily in Spanish, discussing the importance of the Guadalupe apparition and how it helped spread the gospel in Mexico.

“When the Virgin Mother of God appeared to St. Juan Diego, the inhabitants of Mexico suffered a lot – they were first conquered by the Aztecs and shortly after by the Spaniards,” Archbishop Lori said. “They were depressed; few indigenous people wanted to accept the gospel and receive baptism.”

But, the archbishop continued, the Blessed Mother told St. Juan Diego that she was his protector, and that nothing should frighten him.

“Encouraged by the love and protection of the Virgin, Juan Diego fulfilled his mission,” Archbishop Lori said. “The gospel began to spread rapidly in the country.”

Archbishop Lori called on the faithful to do the same in their communities.

“I have been sent to you as your archbishop – I call you to collaborate with me in making Christ known to those who do not know him or who are far from him: with your family and friends, your neighbors and your co-workers and school,” the archbishop said. “Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world and many remain in misery because they do not know him.”

“Help me, brothers, to invite them to put their faith in Christ and to become his

disciples.”

After communion, children carried garlands and single stems of roses, and reenacted the apparition, where Our Lady appeared as an Aztec princess to St. Juan Diego, a convert, in 1531 on Tepeyac Hill near Mexico City.

*Story continues below after photo slideshow.*

Opening and closing processions included “Danza Guadalupana,” a traditional dance group that included elaborate costumes and traditional clothing. The dance was a reference to the Aztecs and how before Guadalupe, they worshipped other gods, but after, the Gospel spread and Catholicism became the popular religion.

Dec. 9 is St. Juan Diego’s feast, the anniversary of the first Guadalupe apparition. The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is celebrated Dec. 12. Many parishes throughout the archdiocese will offer Masses in honor of the feast day.

Redemptorist Father Bruce Lewandowski, pastor, stressed the importance of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a symbol not just for Latin America.

“She shouldn’t just be (important) for our church, but for all the churches because she appeared in the Americas,” he said. “What she represents as far as evangelization and a call to follow Christ is important to all people.”

Sacred Heart of Jesus-Sagrado Corazón de Jesús’ celebrations will culminate with morning and evening Masses and feasts Dec. 12, the anniversary of the second and final apparition.

Father Lewandowski’s favorite part of the Guadalupe celebrations is “Las Mañanitas,” songs sung to Our Lady in the church at 4 a.m. on her feast day. He said parishioners want to begin the feast day serenading her, and they bring flowers and candles.

The Dec. 12 celebrations will continue with a 6 a.m. Mass, followed by a breakfast, and a 7 p.m. Mass followed by a reception featuring traditional Mexican food and

cultural presentations at Sacred Heart of Jesus-Corazón de Jesús.

Dolores Suarez and her husband, Angel, were among the parishioners of Sacred Heart of Jesus-Corazón de Jesús who planned the celebrations. It was the first parish activity they got involved in when they joined the parish 18 years ago.

A native of Tecomán, Colima, Mexico, Dolores thanks her grandmother for exposing her to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Her grandmother, she said, would always make sure the family was praying the rosary and novenas in preparation for her feast day.

“I grew up loving her as the mother of us,” Dolores said. “When I feel sad, when I feel hopeless, I know there’s someone there to take care of my prayers.”

Angel said bringing up their children, Andrew, 16, and Aislinn, 14, in the church is very important as it is part of their background, and also a way to teach them the important things in life.

“If you don’t (teach them faith), what are you going to teach your kids?” Angel said.

Dolores said being raised in faith was important to her, but that it is equally important individuals - including her teenaged children - to develop their own devotion.

“We are given a choice. This is what I believe in part because my parents passed it to me,” she said, adding that her own faith journey has led her devotion to become stronger. “I feel it; I know it.”