

Parishes to mark feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

The Archdiocese of Baltimore has marked the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in recent years, but this year celebrations for the Dec. 12 feast will shift back to parishes that have a Hispanic ministry.

“The parish celebrations have been increasing in attendance and events: vigils, processions, Mass and elaborate receptions,” said Maria Johnson, director of Hispanic ministry for the archdiocese.

Johnson said the feast “is a devotion of the Mexican community that has extended to Central and South Americans in the USA.”

“The apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe,” she continued, “has an important evangelization message: the Gospel must reach people of every race and nationality. She embraces the *mestizo* people, appearing as one of them, ‘a mix of Indian and European features.’ ”

In 1531, in what is now Mexico City, the Blessed Mother is said to have appeared to St. Juan Diego and ultimately revealed herself in his cloak after the peasant tried to convince locals of the Mary’s coming. The image of Mary has become an international inspiration and is credited with bringing many Hispanics to the faith.

Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien, apostolic administrator and auxiliary Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski will help mark the feast in several parishes. Most are celebrating the feast on Dec. 10 and 11,

“The celebration in parishes has an informal flavor,” Johnson said.

She said people make altars full of flowers and pray in front of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe for lengthy periods.

“It is touching to see many people making significant sacrifices in honor to Mary,”

Johnson said. "They buy large bouquets of roses, contribute to bring 'Mariachis' who are expensive in this area of the country, collaborate with food and decorations and buy traditional outfits for their children and themselves.

"It is a visible demonstration of love, trust and joy for a mother that is always present in their lives."

One place that will have a special celebration, Dec. 11 at 12:30 p.m., will be Sacred Heart of Jesus in Highlandtown, which has become the hub of Hispanic activity in Baltimore City. It will be among the sites Archbishop O'Brien visits.

Sacred Heart of Jesus welcomed parishioners of St. Michael in Fells Point, which closed, and has become a success story in Hispanic outreach.

"Each Sunday the Spanish Mass has more people than the church can hold so the challenge may be to make room for more people who come for this feast," Johnson said.

Johnson said the feast is always special to her as well.

"I enjoy seeing the vibrant faith and tender love of the Mexican community for Our Lady," she said. "The Mexican community is more resistant to secularization than other communities are. Their relationship with God needs to be expressed openly and this relationship is tender, friendly, and loving. This is what I enjoy celebrating with these brothers and sisters in faith."