

2012 ANNUAL RESPECT LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

Our Lady of Guadalupe -- Patroness of the Unborn



GRADES 1-2

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, welcomed Him joyfully into the world. Write a note to your mother and tell her how happy you are that she joyfully welcomed you into the world.

Write to your mother thanking her for her love and special care. You may want to draw a picture of you and your mother or Baby Jesus and His Mother Mary.



GRADES 3-4

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of Jesus, but she is also our mother. Sometimes Mary visits us on earth bringing messages of her love and care. She did this when she appeared to Juan Diego in Mexico almost 500 years ago as Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Write a prayer or message to Our Lady thanking her for her great love for all life created by her Son. Ask her protection for babies---born and unborn.



GRADES 5-6

In 1531, Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego in Mexico. She said to him, "I am the Virgin Mary, Mother of the one true God, of Him who gives *life*." Our Lady of Guadalupe is known as the Patroness of the Unborn because when she appeared to Juan Diego, she was pregnant with Jesus. This is why the banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe is often brought to processions and abortion facilities where people pray for an end to abortion. **How can Our Lady change hearts and turn the despair of mothers and fathers who may be considering abortion, into hope that accepts new life gratefully?**



GRADES 7-8

In all of Mary's apparitions on earth, the only time she ever appeared as a pregnant mother was when she appeared to Juan Diego as Our Lady of Guadalupe. She holds within her the unborn Christ, proclaiming the sanctity of life in the womb. Mary was very young and not yet married to Joseph when she conceived Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Why is the pregnant Virgin a perfect image to help us face our struggle against abortion? Based on her own life, what advice do you think Mary would give someone contemplating abortion?**



GRADES 9-12

When Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego in Mexico, the Aztec people were practicing human sacrifice to appease their deities. They believed that the world would be destroyed by the gods if human sacrifices were not carried out. This is a theology of despair. Whatever moral aversion the Aztecs may have had to human sacrifice, their fear and despair made them believe they had no choice but to practice it. As a result of Our Lady's appearance, their hearts were converted and the practice of human sacrifice was abolished within a very short time. People often engage in actions that they would not otherwise consider when they feel their survival is at stake. **Compare the despair felt by women contemplating abortion--and their reasons for despair--to the despair likely experienced by the Aztecs when they succumbed to the practice of human sacrifice.**

THE STORY OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Juan Diego, a poor 55-year old Aztec Indian and a convert to the Christian faith, was on his way to chapel in the Tepayac Hill country in Central Mexico, when he encountered a beautiful woman surrounded by a ball of light. Speaking in his native tongue, the Lady identified herself: "My dear little son, I love you. I desire you to know who I am. I am the ever-virgin Mary, Mother of the true God who gives life and maintains its existence. He created all things. He is in all places. He is Lord of Heaven and Earth. I desire a church in this place where your people may experience my compassion. All those who sincerely ask my help in their work and in their sorrows will know my Mother's Heart in this place. Here I will see their tears; I will console them and they will be at peace. So run now to Tenochtitlan and tell the Bishop all that you have seen and heard."

Juan immediately responded to Mary's request. He went to the palace of Bishop Fray Juan de Zumarraga and repeated the Lady's request, which the Bishop promised to consider. Juan was disappointed and felt himself unworthy to persuade someone as important as a Bishop. He returned to the hill and found Mary there waiting for him. Imploring her to send someone else, she responded: "My little son, there are many I could send but you are the one I have chosen." She then told him to return the next day to the Bishop and repeat her request. Juan again met with the Bishop who, on rehearing his story, asked him to ask the Lady to provide a sign as proof of who she was. Juan dutifully returned to the hill and told Mary, who was again waiting for him there, of the Bishop's request. Mary responded: "My little son, am I not your Mother? Do not fear. The Bishop shall have his sign. Come back to this place tomorrow."

Unfortunately, Juan was not able to return to the hill the next day. His uncle had become mortally ill and Juan stayed to care for him. With his uncle near death, Juan left him to find a priest. As he passed Tepayac Hill, he found Mary waiting for him. "Do not be distressed, my littlest son. Am I not here with you who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Your uncle will not die at this time. There is no reason for you to engage a priest, for his health is restored at this moment. Go to the top of the hill and cut the flowers that are growing there. Bring them then to me." While it was freezing on the hillside, Juan obeyed Mary's instructions and went to the top of the hill where he found a full bloom of Castilian roses. Removing his tilma, a poncho-like cape made of cactus fiber, he cut the roses and carried them back to Mary. She rearranged the roses and told him: "My little son, this is the sign I am sending to the Bishop. Tell him that with this sign I request his greatest efforts to complete the church I desire in this place. Show these flowers to the Bishop and this time, he will believe all you tell him." At the palace, Juan once again came before the Bishop, told him his story, and opened the tilma letting the flowers fall out. But it wasn't the beautiful roses that caused the Bishop to fall to his knees; for there, on the tilma, was a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary precisely as Juan had described her. He then returned to his village where he met his uncle who was completely cured. His uncle told him he had met a young woman, surrounded by a soft light, who told him that she had just sent his nephew to Tenochtitlan with a picture of herself. She told his uncle, "Call me and call my image Santa Maria de Guadalupe."

When Mary first appeared to Saint Juan Diego in 1531, Mexico had been in the hands of Christian leaders for only a short time. Human sacrifice, where the blood of infants was often spilled to appease the thirsty demons of the old rite, was still practiced, a gruesome continuation of the country's long enslavement to pagan fears. Into this cavern of darkness and ignorance, our Lady of Guadalupe brought a message of maternal compassion. Within ten years of this apparition, ten million natives had converted to Catholicism. The tilma shows Mary as the God-bearer---She is pregnant with her Divine Son.