

Our Lady of Guadalupe and Racism

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By Tom Venzor

The apparition of Our Lady at Guadalupe, inscribed on the tilma worn by Juan Diego nearly 500 years ago, is pregnant with meaning and purpose. As Father Peter John Cameron, OP, recounts in his book, *Mysteries of the Virgin Mary: Living Our Lady's Graces*, “[t]he ‘first impression’ of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the indigenous people [of Mexico] must have been shocking.”

Father Cameron highlights several aspects of Our Lady of Guadalupe that would have shocked the Aztecs: Mary stands on the moon; Mary stands in front of the sun; and Mary’s mantle is adorned with the stars. For the Aztecs, the moon, the sun, and the stars all symbolized different gods which the Aztecs worshipped. As well, the blue-green hue of Mary’s mantle depicted the color reserved for Aztec royalty. In each of these aspects, Mary establishes her primacy, as the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, over the false gods of the Aztecs.

In their book, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mother of the Civilization of Love*, Carl Anderson and Father Eduardo Chavez add to the depth of Our Lady of Guadalupe’s appearance by commenting specifically on the color of Mary’s skin. They note that her skin was “[n]either white like the Spaniards nor dark like the Indians, the Virgin is a mestiza—a combination of the two.... In this way, the Virgin...reaffirm[s] both in their uniqueness but at the same time representing an important link between them: she is their mother.” In Mary’s maternal love, we discover authentic love as universal and transcends borders, yet always affirms what is good, true, and beautiful about every culture, nation, and race.

In a manner that mirrors Our Lady of Guadalupe, the United States Bishops recently issued a document, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*. In their condemnation of the continuing, widespread presence of racism in America, the Bishops denounce the false gods that produce racism (such as fear of the other, prejudice, and hatred) and provide a path forward for overcoming personal and societal forms of racism.

The Bishops recognize that racism “arises when—either consciously or subconsciously—a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior,

and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard.” Racism violates the virtue of justice, which calls for us to live in right relationship with God, our neighbor, and all creation. As such, racism is a sin.

While the Bishops acknowledge the developments to overcome racism, they admit racism retains a stronghold in our country. Adopting [Micah 6](#) as a framework, the Bishops call upon everyone to do justice, love goodness, and walk humbly with God, in order to overcome racism.

For the Bishops this means encountering our neighbors of a different race, especially those on the peripheries. In listening to their historical and lived experiences, we can better understand their struggles. This also means an examination of our personal and collective conscience, to identify how we have sinned against our neighbors in, for example, the Native American, African American, and Hispanic communities. The Bishops stress that “racist attitudes of yesterday” produce the generational racism of today. This also means undertaking other actions, such as denouncing people and organizations that foster racism and dismantling policies and institutional barriers that arouse continued inequality.

Ultimately, the Bishops call for the conversion of heart of each and every one of us, that God’s grace would recommit us to unity with our neighbor, regardless of the color of their skin.

To end racism we can seek the guidance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who points us to Christ in Whom “[t]here is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,” for we are all one in Him.

As Father Luis de Santa Theresa preached in a homily dating back to 1682: “Mary was (says St. Peter Damian)...the end of the past night and the beginning of the following day. She was the Aurora who put an end to the shadow of sin and began the lights of grace.”

May Mary lead us from the darkness and slavery of racism and into the light and freedom of Christ.