

Our Lady and the American Indian

by

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ONE of the most famous Marian sanctuaries of the world is the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. The traveller who for the first time penetrates within its walls is struck with wonder at the size of its naves, the sumptuousness of its ornamentation, and the solemnity of the liturgical functions which take place there, but he meets nowhere else with anything approaching the atmosphere of Marian devotion which is therein to be met with. It is not only a devotion manifesting itself in public ceremonies; it is something particular which is difficult to describe. It is a personal rendez-vous that whosoever kneels before Mary keeps. The sanctuary is the home where each one meets the Mother of all. Enormous multitudes go there to recite the litany of their woes, pains, and afflictions or go to relate their joys and the problems of their personal

lives. All the visitors to the sanctuary seem to have forgotten this world from the first moment that they find themselves before the miraculous painting of Mary which is to be seen above the high altar. It is the painting about which the Holy Father said: "On the cloak of humble Juan Diego, brushes which were not from here below left painted a most appealing Image which the destructive work of the centuries was to respect." This image, sweetly modest with its hands joined over its heart, immediately draws the attention of the faithful.

Quite notable, all the length of each day of the year, is the continual flow of pilgrimages composed of Indians from all the regions of the Mexican territory. They are obliged to travel on foot over long roads down through the valleys and up into the mountains, these Indians who come to kneel at the feet of the one they consider as their Queen and Lady. They do not enter into the sanctuary timidly, knowing well that they are in their own home. There they kneel before the altar and throw off the burden of their petitions. A tourist having observed them,

was deeply moved and declared: "It is enough to observe the prayer of these Indians to understand what faith is!" And another: "The closest impression of ecstasy is conveyed by the Indians when they find themselves in front of Mary of Guadalupe." They talk to Our Lady with the same tenderness with which Juan Diego spoke to her—the first apparition took place more than four centuries ago! They cry and they laugh with her. It would seem that each one has a direct vision of the reality of the Queen of Heaven. And when all these groups leave the temple, comforted by their visit to their Mother, happily they retrace the route that they had traveled. In all simplicity, they trod, once again, the road through the mountains, carrying on their lips the sweet savor of the dialog between Mother and son...

And that this faith is not vain, is proved by the deep-rooted Catholicism reigning among the Indians. They have kept the faith through all the persecutions and attacks of the enemies of the Church in Mexico, and they know how to be highly indignant when someone is to be found who commits any irreverence towards Mary, his Mother. The Indian of America understands that in Mary he has a Mother who has taken him under Her special protection. He feels as secure as a little child on its mother's lap.

That is why this special love of Mary of Guadalupe for the Indians is a marvelous revelation for all Indians. That is why there is no doubt that if the descendants of the race to which Tekakwitha belonged, if the other Indians of Canada and the United States, some day came to kneel before Mary of Guadalupe, in Mexico, they would immediately be won by her love as she gazes down upon them. They would feel that she is really their very own. She wished to appear for the first time in America to an Indian. The first words that Mary pronounced in the North American continent was spoken to an Indian. The language that he used was the Nahuatl, an Indian dialect.

Consequently, it is necessary to organize a pilgrimage of the Indians of North America to the Basilica of Guadalupe —

1. To honor Mary under her title of "protectress" of the Indians of the New World;

2. To unite the persons of Juan Diego and of Kateri as symbols of the Indians of America should have profound repercussions in the faith of these peoples. A deeper bond of affection should bind them to Mary. And why not? It would bring about, if needs be, the special intervention of Our Lady to glorify her two servants: Juan Diego and Kateri Tekakwitha.

(To be continued.)