

THE STORY OF GUADALUPE is a Xmas story

"On Dec. 9th 1531 Mary came to Cuauhtlatohuac, as Pope John Paul II called him at his beatification on May 6, 1990, a name that means 'the eagle that speaks'. Better known by his imposed Spanish name, Juan Diego, a 57-year-old catechist was hurrying to the mission at Tlatilolco for Mass. Even the earth, the boulders, the plants glowed as Mary spoke to him in his native Nahuatl, from a desert hill long dedicated to Tonanzin, the Aztec 'mother of our gods'. As a sign to the local, sceptical Spanish bishop, Mary provided the marvellous 'out of season and out of site' flowers and her own life-sized portrait on Juan's tilma or cloak. There she was mestiza, métisse, Spanish and Aztec... reconciling in herself the two civilizations who had so recently come together. Her clothing was like that of the Aztec goddess Tonanzin, and the black sash to an Aztec meant that she was pregnant. Being 'clothed with the sun, the moon at her feet', both gods to the Aztec, she makes us think of Revelation 12. And she was about to give birth to Jesus in another culture. The Aztecs now saw a tender God of the Gospel who was on their side. And because they saw her as someone familiar, an earth mother who loved them and embraced their culture, the Aztec and other dispossessed First Nations embraced her as 'la Madrecita'



(the dear little one) or even 'Maronita' (the dear little brown one)."

"Not only does Mary appear to an Aztec but also as an Aztec. She has the same skin colour. The sun, moon and stars on her person and around her have specific Aztec meaning. She is dressed in colours reserved for their royalty, and she imprints her image on Juan Diego's 'tilma' or

cotton coat. There can be no doubt that her apparitions were meant to affirm Juan Diego's people, and that all First Nations people can find in Guadalupe a deep affirmation of their worth and values.

Christmas is the celebration of promise, the promise that henceforth God is in our midst, God is one of us. The story of Guadalupe is a Christmas story. Perhaps even now God is here in our midst, in ways we have not seen because we have been looking in the wrong places. Guadalupe and the native, Juan Diego, invite us to new ways of finding God among us."

Kateri Tekakwitha and Juan Diego, for being devoted to Mary, "la Conquistadora of the Americas" are claimed to be two symbols of America. These two Indians, we hope officially to call saints and signal protectors of the Native Races of the New World.

The Old Story in a New Land

Father Antoine shivered slightly, even in the shelter of the log hut. He was cold with the bitter chill of the Canadian northland. But he was colder with loneliness and longing for home. Home, to Father Antoine, was the ordered peace of his monastery, back on the sunny slopes of the southern French hills. Home was the sweet ringing of the chapel bell, the solemn songs of the deep-voiced choir, the conversation about high and holy things.

Father Antoine raised homesick eyes to his surroundings. Outside were the huge pine trees hung with gleaming snow; the dead stillness of the forest; the snowshoes piled beside the low door of the nearby hunter's lodge. Around and about moved the tall forms of Indians, members of an unfriendly tribe camped nearby for a few days. Their presence made Father Antoine feel that he was indeed a stranger in a foreign land. For it was Christmas Eve! Christmas Eve and not a soul but faithful Pierre the fur trapper, his guide and companion, to join with him in the Christmas service tomorrow.

Yes, it was Christmas Eve, and all about him were the people of this unfriendly tribe. He had not expected to find them here, near the lonely hut of Pierre, where he had come to rest for a few days. Yet for the sake of just such people he had left the peace and order of the monastery and braved danger and hardship in an unfriendly, new world. Now as his chance to help.

As the thought took hold of his mind, Father Antoine's heart

began to glow once more. Christmas Eve, and here were those who had never heard the most glorious story of all the world. Christmas Eve, and here was he, knowing their language and able, though haltingly, to tell them of that story. The loneliness and cold vanished from the heart of Father Antoine. The wintry woods at which he had shivered not so many minutes ago seemed to sparkle with light and joy.

Father Antoine went hurrying into the woods, filled with the delight of a new idea. He would cut boughs of pine and hemlock and the graceful balsam. He would deck the cabin door and window. Pierre would bring logs and build a mighty fire before the door. They would invite the Indians to come and listen to the Christmas story. As he worked busily to get the greens, Father Antoine began to repeat to himself the story of the angels and the shepherds and the Wise Men. In what words should he tell the story to these Indians?

Father Antoine came to a sudden pause as he worked. He remembered that he did not know the Indian word for "sheep"; nor for "shepherd"; nor for "camels," as far as that went. I must ask Pierre, he thought. Then he laughed aloud in the still forest. There would be no such words in the language of the people of the far north woods. They had never seen any sheep. Nor any shepherds! And most certainly no camels!

Father Antoine went slowly on with his work. His mind was busy planning the story in a way which could be understood by the

