

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, STAR OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

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Foundress

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In John Paul II's apostolic letter at the closing of the Jubilee Year, Novo Millennio Ineunte or At the Start of the New Millennium (NMI), he told us in the very first lines that, after having lived such an intense experience of grace and mercy as was the Jubilee year, we find resounding in our hearts today the words by which the Christ Jesus invites the Apostle Peter to "Go out into the deep" for a catch of fish. Peter and the other apostles trusted the words of Christ and threw out their nets. "When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish" (Luke 5:4).



Our Holy Father told us repeatedly that the Jubilee Year was one of abundant grace, mercy and salvation. Christ opened wide His Heart in order to pour forth in abundance graces of salvation over the Church and humanity. In the apostolic letter he clearly reveals to us his conviction: "It is impossible to take the measure of this event of grace which in the course of the year has touched people's hearts. But certainly, "a river of living water," the water that continually flows "from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (cf. Rev 22:1), has been poured out on the Church. This is the water of the Spirit which quenches thirst and brings new life" (NMI, 1).

The Holy Father says he feels the need to tell us that what has occurred demands our attention, and in a certain sense, our interpretation, in order to listen to what the Spirit, throughout this intense year, has said and says to the Church (NMI, 1).

Yes, what occurred during the Jubilee Year requires from each one of us a time of profound prayer and serious reflection so as to consider what the Holy Spirit is telling us after having poured Himself out in such a particular and copious manner. What has the Holy Spirit told us, and what does He tell us now at the beginning of this new Millennium? "Go out into the deep!" The hour has come to drop the nets and to draw out an enormous amount of fish! A river of living water has been poured upon the Church, and this water, when it flows, cleans and heals all that is stagnant and putrid, and possesses a living force that causes all that is bathed by it to become fecund. Isn't this the prophecy in Ezekiel? "This water flows ...[from beneath the threshold of the temple]... and empties into the sea, the salt waters, which it makes fresh. Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live, and there shall be abundant fish, for wherever this water comes the sea shall be made fresh. Fishermen shall be standing along it...spreading their nets there. Its fish shall be...very numerous..Along both banks of the river, fruit trees of every kind shall grow; their leaves shall not fade, nor their fruit fail" (cf. Ezekiel 47:1, 8-12).

The Heart of Jesus has been opened wide. Grace has poured forth. Now it is only necessary that we actively and responsibly cooperate in the transformation of our hearts by an authentic life of holiness and go forth generously and with ardor in the fulfillment of our mission.

Go out into the Deep

I believe that the oars in which the boat of the Church will go forth out into the deep, in order to draw out the miraculous catch of fish, will be holiness and mission. Both are fruits of the action of the Holy Spirit. Holiness and mission should move harmoniously in order to lead the boat out into the deep with a new force. Both will empower the Church so that it will shine in the world as a torch of faith, hope and love. Both will open new paths by which the Church encounters the men and women of today. These encounters include anxious and often disorientated hearts . . .the needs of the people, their struggles and desires, their questions, concerns and fears. Both oars ought to direct the boat of the Church of the Third Millennium with confidence, determination, and diligence through the midst of the great waves that threaten it. It is guided with assurance to the port of the designs of God by the Luminous Star who is the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fishermen and navigators, well before the modern age of electricity, would depend upon the stars in order to plan a course for their voyage through the vast ocean. We can see through this analogy that the Blessed Virgin Mary, as Star of the Sea, guides us through the turbulent waters of our lives into the sure port who is Christ.

We have seen a river of water being poured forth over the Church (NMI, 1). The Holy Spirit has been poured forth as on the day of Pentecost, in order to change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, to transform lives, to heal blindness, to free the oppressed and to lift up the paralytics. The Holy Spirit has also been poured forth as on the day of Pentecost to make us courageous enough to enter into the world and not be afraid of its contradiction; to make us richer by the many charisms He distributes in the Body of Christ; to make us experience His power; to make us younger in our joy and enthusiasm to proclaim the Gospel; to make us free to live as children of God and to be ardent witnesses of the Gospel of Love. Yes, the Holy Spirit has been poured forth upon us to renew our hearts in order to send us into the field of the world so as to fulfill the mission of the New Evangelization: new in ardor, new in methods, and new in expression. The Holy Spirit has been poured forth to lead us to a life of holiness, and to send us forward on this urgent mission of the evangelization of our contemporary world.

The hour has come and we must be punctual. The Church as a whole and each one of us have received this call at the start of the Third Millennium. We have to go out, drop the nets, and draw out the fish that will nourish us with life and truth in Christ. None of us can feel excluded from this urgent call. On the contrary, the captain of the boat is Peter, the Holy Father, but the oars are rowed by the members of the Church. The sure guide for our path through the ocean is Our Blessed Mother. The hour has come so that, testifying with the power of the Holy Spirit, we may go forward to the New Evangelization which is so needed in our world today.

Why a New Evangelization?

Evangelization is not just a work of the Church today, but rather it has been the life of the Church. "Woe to me if I do not preach [the Gospel]" (1 Cor. 9:16). There exists an entire history of evangelization, just as there is a history of the Church - a history that has come about through the encounter of the Church with the different cultures of each age and with each generation. To the extent that the inhabited world grew, the Church also found herself in front of new efforts of evangelization. For this reason, the Church has always seen herself - and considers herself still - in the state of mission. The Church evangelizes, the Church announces Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Church renews each day, and in each generation and historic moment, its struggle against the spirit of this world. It is a struggle which is nothing but the fight for 'the soul of the world.' We know that at this time, there exists a powerful anti-evangelization effort that has at its disposal means and programs and works with power and force - powerfully opposing the Gospel and all the efforts of evangelization. The struggle found in the modern world is enormous (cf. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p.105-117). As Cardinal Wojtyla (John Paul II) said during his visit to the United States, "it is a decisive moment of battle."

"Our world feels an urgent need for the Gospel. Perhaps we feel this need precisely because the world seems to be distancing itself from the Gospel, or rather because the world has not yet drawn near to the Gospel" (John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p.114).

The expression, New Evangelization, presented first by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), comes from the new challenges that the contemporary world brings to the mission of the Church. The Church must present the Gospel in the midst of these great challenges of the modern world. For the Church, for all of us, to evangelize means to bring the Good News to all sectors of humanity and, with its influence, transform it from within, renewing humanity itself. "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21:22). However, the truth is that humanity is not renewed unless men and women are renewed first. The goal of evangelization is an interior change of the human heart. The message proclaimed by the Church seeks to convert the personal, as well as the collective, consciences of men and women, including the activities that they partake in and their concrete environments (EN,18).

All Evangelization is preceded by the maternal presence of the Virgin Mary . . . the Star that guides the ship!

In the arms of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Word-made-Flesh was presented to the world. She brought Jesus to the world and to our history . . . She, who was filled with His presence, went in haste to serve Her cousin Elizabeth, and just by the Blessed Mother's greeting, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Who better than Mary can reveal Christ? Was it not in Her arms that the world - the shepherds (representing Israel) and the wise men (the Gentiles) - found Jesus? Is it not She who presents Christ to the world? Is it not She who, as teacher and singular witness, reveals to the newly born Church the mysteries of Christ? Yes, sitting at the school of the Heart of Mary is where we learn the deepest mysteries of Christ!

In order to evangelize it is necessary to first become a witness of the life of Christ: Singular witnesses of the Mysteries of Christ. "Having lived her condition as a disciple of the Lord perfectly, she calls Christians to progress on the path of a fervent life in accordance with the Gospel" (John Paul II, Letter to Cardinal Paul Tung, December 16, 1997).

To evangelize is to announce Christ, the Savior of mankind. It is here that we find the reason for the Church's existence. It is Mary who has an irreplaceable role in the announcement of Christ. She is present in the three phases of the history of salvation: before Christ, during the life of Christ, and in the time of the Church. Her fiat brought the Messiah into the world. She was singularly associated to His redemptive mission and She is the Mother of the Church. Mary plays an active role in the passing from one phase to another, as well as in the encounter of the Church with each generation and historic moments.

It is necessary to understand the importance of the testimony of life which precedes the testimony of words. Only witnesses are credible; only those who testify with their lives are able to touch hearts and minds that are confused and disorientated. Paul VI told us: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (EN, 41). This is why the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary illuminates the mission of Evangelization. She is the evangelizer because She is a living Gospel, a true model whom the evangelizer is able to present to the person to whom he has proposed the saving message as the highest realization of the Christian message.

In order to come to know Christ more profoundly, as well as to be able to make Him known, the Church ought to look to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She has known Him perfectly since She bore Him in Her own womb, and also because She is the one who can better reveal Him to the world, as it was through Her that Christ the Savior came into the world. If we want to know Christ better, the Church, rather each one of us, ought to enter into the Heart of the Blessed Virgin and there find Jesus. There we can give Him to others with the same love, fidelity, zeal and veracity with which She has given Him to us.

Star of the New Evangelization

"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage . . . They set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star" (Mt 2:2, 9-10).

A star is a celestial body that shines at night - a celestial body that shines in the darkness of sinfulness, error, and lack of faith. It shines, bringing with it Him who is the Light of the world. Mary is the star of the third millennium just as in the beginning of the Christian era She was the dawn that preceded Christ over the horizon of human history. In effect, Mary was chronologically born before Christ; She conceived Him and inserted Him in our human history.

" . . . Mary appeared on the horizon of salvation history before Christ. It is a fact that when 'the fullness of time' was definitively drawing near - the saving advent of Emmanuel - He who was from eternity destined to be His Mother already existed on earth. The fact that she 'preceded' the coming of Christ is reflected every year in the liturgy of Advent. Therefore, if to that ancient historical expectation of the Savior we compare these years which are bringing us closer to the end of the second Millennium after Christ and to the beginning of the third, it becomes fully comprehensible that in this present period we wish to turn in a special way to her, the one who in the 'night' of the Advent expectation began to shine like a true 'Morning Star' (Stella Matutina). For just as this star, together with the 'dawn,' precedes the rising of the sun, so Mary from the time of her Immaculate Conception preceded the coming of the Savior, the rising of the 'Sun of Justice' in the history of the human race" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater* [RM], 3).

Yes, we need the Sun of Justice to shine with great force over the darkness of our contemporary world. We need the Star which proceeds Him to shine, that star which leads the wise men to His encounter.

It is the dawn that precedes and reveals the Sun of Justice who is Jesus Christ. It ought to be known and manifested so that the Divine Sun may be also known (St. Luis de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, no.120). The great works of God and of the Church are always preceded and prepared by Our Blessed Mother. The great works of evangelization that the Church realizes are preceded by the Star of Evangelization, the Blessed Virgin Mary . . . and the new evangelization cannot be different. Pope Pius XII made a remarkable statement about our times being a Marian era 'par excellence.'

This New Evangelization, in which the American Continent is on the forefront, is directed by the Blessed Virgin just as it was so in the first evangelization. "To conclude, I would like to turn my thoughts to Tepeyac, to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the first and the new evangelization of America. To her I entrust the pilgrim Church in Mexico and the American continent, and I fervently ask her to guide her children, so that they will enter the third millennium with faith and hope" (John Paul II, *Homily*, January 24, 1999).

How did the Star of the First Evangelization of this continent manifest Herself?

The evangelization of America was, from its beginnings, marked by the Marian presence. We are able to say that the historical and cultural identity of the Latin American countries "is symbolized in a most luminous manner in the "mestiza" countenance of Mary of Guadalupe, who has revealed herself at the beginning of the evangelization (cf. John Paul II, *Address at the Opening of the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops*, October 12, 1992, no.24).

The discovery of the New World: Our Continent

The Church was losing many children because of the Reformation, but Our Lady gave birth to many others... In Spain, Christopher Columbus prayed in front of the image of the Lady of Guadalupe before he began his voyage, and he took a replica of the image with him on his journey. The ship on which Columbus sailed was called the Santa Maria. Next, the day America was discovered was the 12th of October, feast day of our Lady of the Pillar. This was an apparition of our Lady to the Apostle James as he was trying to evangelize Spain. The first prayer said in the New World was the *Salve Regina* - prayed by Columbus and his companions.

However, a few years after its discovery, as in the case of the apostle James, the work of evangelization in the Americas was not bearing fruit. Therefore, the Blessed Mother appeared in the New World to an Indian named Juan Diego - a very simple, humble and childlike heart to whom, I believe, was entrusted with one of the most beautiful messages of Our Lady. What an entrustment!

The Tilma and the Image

Our Lady of Guadalupe left Her image imprinted on Juan Diego's tilma as a permanent gift for the whole Continent and for the world. The tilma, a rough material that would never be used to paint an image upon, was the one Our Lady used - not to leave a painting of Herself, but a miraculous "living image," as it has been defined. Perhaps with this sign, She is trying to call us to give Her the rough material of our hearts so as to allow Her to imprint Her image on them.

"Blessed Virgin Mary, like St. Juan Diego, may we take your imprinted image along the path of our lives and announce the Good News of Christ to all men!" (Prayer of John Paul II).

She appeared as a "mestiza," one who was a mixture of Indian and Spanish descent. Her hands, one of which was darker than the other, were united in prayer; in this way our Mother came to unite the two races and cultures. She used signs and languages that were understandable to both the Indian and the Spanish priests.

As well, She had a sash at Her waste indicating that She was pregnant. On Her womb, a flower with four leaves was depicted - the Aztec sign of divinity. In this manner the image indicated that the Lady was with child and that Her child was God. Through all the details on the image, Our Lady directed the Indian people down the path that leads to the true God and to a deeper realization that they had been redeemed.

Furthermore, the brooch on Her neck had a cross on it like those the Indian people had seen on the Spanish ships. Her eyes, according to the scientific studies, depict the images of Juan Diego, the bishop, the friars, and a family who were present when the tilma was unfolded. Her eyes were looking down, revealing Her maternal love and care promised in Her messages.

The stars on Her mantel were the constellations of the sky that night. These indicate that She is the star that shines in the darkness. For the Indians, the stars, moon and sun were gods, and Our Lady came with the stars as a mantel, covered by the sun, and with the moon under Her feet. They were at Her service, as She is the Queen of heaven and earth. Also, the stars remind me of the promise of God to Abraham: "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can . . . so shall your descendants be" (Gen 15:5). Perhaps Our Lady came to tell us that She was going to bring many children to this land . . . She was going to give birth to Christ in this new World and multiply the descendants of the Church.

It is thought that Our Lady used the Aztec words *nahuatl de coatlaxopeuh*, which is pronounced "quatlasupe" and thus sounds very much like the Spanish word Guadalupe. *Coa* means serpent, *tla* is the article "the," and *xopeuh* means to crush. Therefore, Our Lady referred to Herself as the one who "crushes the serpent." Actually, the Tepeyac was the temple of the "divine mother, serpent." With Her appearance, Our Lady transformed it into 'the little house' of the Blessed Mother and the most visited Marian shrine in the world. It was the place where many human sacrifices, particularly of children, were done, and it now has become a powerful place of life.

We also ought to remember that the Aztecs would annually offer more than 20,000 men, women and children as human sacrifices to their gods. These rites would often include the cannibalism of the victims' bodies. In 1487, on the occasion of the dedication of a new temple in Tenochtitlan, about 80,000 captives were immolated in human sacrifice, in a single ceremony that lasted about four days. Certainly in Mexico, with the conversion of millions of the inhabitants to Christianity, Our Lady crushed the head of the serpent. "May the continent of hope be the continent of life! ...The time has come to banish once and for all from the continent every attack against life" (John Paul II, Homily, Jan. 23, 1999).

Moreover, She appeared on December 9th. At that time, some countries celebrated the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on that day. She came to us as a Catechist. Already in the first message She gave us a powerful summary of who She is and Her mission towards us, Her children: "Know and understand, you, the smallest of my children, that I am the ever Virgin Mary, the Mother of the true God for whom we live: of the Creator from whom all things are - Lord of heaven and earth. I most ardently desire that you build here a temple for me, so that in it, I can manifest and give all of my love, compassion, help and protection, as I am your loving Mother - of all of you who live together on earth, of all of humanity, and of all those who love and admire me and who invoke me and confide in me. There I will listen to their cries and to their pain, and I will remedy their miseries, pains and sufferings" (Words of Our Lady to St. Juan Diego, December 9, 1531).

Through the intervention of the Blessed Virgin, three thousand conversions took place every day. It was a daily Pentecost. Isn't this what is necessary for the New Evangelization in a world so paganized, so full of idols and false gods?

America, a Marian Continent

The evangelization of America was marked, from its beginning, by a Marian presence.

"May love for the Mother of God, so characteristic of American piety, help guide your own life according to the spirit and values of the Gospel, so that you may bear witness to them in the world. Our Lady of Guadalupe, intimately associated with the birth of the Church in America, was the radiant Star which illumined the proclamation of Christ the Savior to the children of these peoples, helping the first missionaries in their evangelization. I ask her, who bore the 'Good News of God' in her womb to help them be witnesses of Christ to others" (John Paul II, Angelus Message in Mexico, January 24, 1999).

The following are all places where Mary has manifested Her presence in the New World:

Mexico: Guadalupe; Argentina: Virgin de Lujan; Bolivia: Our Lady of Copacabana; Brazil: La Aparecida. Canada: Nta Dame du Cap; Colombia: Chiquinquirá; Costa Rica: Our Lady of the Angels; Cuba: Our Lady Charity; Nicaragua: the Immaculate; Panamá: Holy Mary of Antigua; Puerto Rico: Our Lady of Providence; Perú: Our Lady of Mercy; Dominican Republic: Our Lady of Altigracia; Venezuela: Our Lady of Coromoto; San Salvador: Our Lady of Peace; Paraguay: Our Lady of Caucupé; Honduras: Our Lady of Suyapa; Guatemala: Our Lady of the Rosary.

This is why, in the heart of America, Our Lady appeared and miraculously imprinted Her image as a sign of Her continual presence. It is Her presence in the Heart of America. John Paul II has called the Basilica of Guadalupe, during his homily at the Conclusion of the Synod of America in Rome, the Marian heart of America. "We have concluded the Synod's work on the day dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the first witness to Christ's presence in America. Her shrine in the heart of the American continent represents an indelible reminder of the evangelization achieved in the past five centuries . . . Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother of all America, help us to be faithful stewards of the great mysteries of God . . . Help us to confirm our brothers and

sisters in the faith! Queen of peace! Save the nations and peoples of the whole continent who trust in you" (John Paul II, Homily, Dec. 12, 1997).

There is a Marian heart in our Continent, the 'little house' that Our Lady wanted to have built for all of Her children to go and to listen to Her maternal heart saying, "Do not be frightened or worried; do not let your heart be troubled; do not fear that sickness or any other sickness or anguish. Am I not here? Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hallow of my mantle, in the embrace of my arms? What else do you need? Do not be troubled or afflicted about anything" (Fourth Apparition to Juan Diego, Dec. 12, 1531).

The Holy Father, John Paul II, in his urgent call to the New Evangelization - new because it confronts challenges never before presented to the Church - invites us to turn our hearts and our glance to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is the guide and shining beacon for the Christian on the sea of life (John Paul II, World Youth Day, August 20, 1989). She is also the Star that evokes the Marian seal of the works of Evangelization. She, the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, invites us to unite with Her ardent prayer calling upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit upon the Church and the world. She wants to form witnesses of Christ in the world, living agents of the New Evangelization that John Paul II signaled as the primary work of the Church in the Third Millennium.

Conclusion

"We ought to remember and be grateful for the role which the Virgin Mary has played in the evangelization of our continent. She shows us Christ and leads us to him. She, the Mother of Jesus, has truly been the Star of Evangelization, which proceeds and accompanies her children in the pilgrimage of faith and hope . . . We cannot announce Christ, true God and true Man, without speaking of the Virgin Mary, His Mother. We cannot confess faith in the Incarnation without proclaiming, as the Church has done from of old, that the Son of God was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. We cannot contemplate the mystery of the redeeming death of Christ without remembering the one whom participated in a singular manner in His suffering, and whom Christ himself, from the Cross, has given to us as Mother and has entrusted to us, so that we would receive her as one of the most precious gifts that He has left to us. In this manner, with the Gospel of Christ, the Church receives the announcement of the maternal presence of Mary in the life of Christians . . . Just as in the new formed Church at Pentecost, the figure of Mary is present in all the beginnings of evangelization. The Virgin offers to us her Divine Son and invites us to believe in Him as Master of Truth and Bread of Life" (John Paul II, Message to the Marian Congress in Venezuela, May 13, 1992).

May Our Lady guide the Church of America, a Church called to be in the forefront of the New Evangelization, to be totally disposed to be moved by the power of the Spirit and to communicate - with a greater freedom, a renewed courage, and a youthful enthusiasm - the Gospel of Love and the Gospel of Life.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us!

St. Joseph, custodian of the life of the womb of the Blessed Mother, pray for us!

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