

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Our Lady Of Guadalupe

In 1789 there was a disastrous fire in the Presidio of Monterey, then located where the Royal Presidio Chapel now stands. This church, in these modern days perhaps better known as San Carlos Church, was damaged beyond repair. Not giving up to unfortunate circumstances, workmen were sent by the Viceroy from Mexico to build the new church to serve the capital of Monterey, which was dedicated in 1795.

Among the workmen sent from Mexico to assist in the building was a stone carver, Manuel Ruiz, who it is thought, was the one who carved the small figure of the Patron Saint of Mexico, high on the top of the facade. For many years it was barely discernible, there had been so many layers of paint applied and the dust of the ages had gathered in the niche - but the time finally came when in WPA days a face-lifting took place and the figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe was again to be admired.

As we passed the Chapel a few days ago we decided to devote a column, during this Christmas season to a story about the Madonna atop the main facade. The bas-relief is one unique to the New World, Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe.

Many of my friends and acquaintances collect Madonnas and amongst their ever-increasing collections we have found that the very Madonna that we write of today is one of the most popular and depicted so beautifully by so many artisans the world over.

This is the story of her creation as told in Mexico:

In the year 1543, there lived a very humble and simple Indian, 55 years old, in the hill country north of Tepeyac, It was here that Juan Diego saw for the first time the now famous apparition of Mexico's Guadalupe. The name Juan Diego had just been given him as he had recently received baptism from the friar at the Church of St. James. It was only ten years after Hernandez had conquered the City of Mexico and the surrounding country, but even then several churches had been built and the first bishop-elect was at his post, His Grace, Fray Juan de Zumarraga. Progress was slow but encouraging as not long before human sacrifices were being made to Tezcatlipoca, the Soul God.

Juan Diego was a good neophyte and on the morning of the 9th of December as he was on his way to Mass a rainbow of many hues stopped him in an unbroken rapture and amongst the stones he saw a beautiful brown maiden, smiling as she spoke, "Juan Diego, my child, where are you going? I want you to know that I am the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Author of Life, Creator of all things, and Lord of Heaven and Earth . . ."

Thus, off went Juan Diego to relay the message that was given him in his native Nahuatl the only language that he knew. Bishop Zumarraga, who was a true son of St. Francis, listened with kind attention, but knew that good lowly folks - even he himself, might easily imagine things . . . Juan Diego's vision could be one of these. That evening he returned to Tepeyac and again saw the Lady. He begged that she send someone else to relay her message to the Bishop, some noble and high-born person who would be believed more readily. The Lady replied that he would be the messenger and none other.

Early the next day Juan returned only to be told that the Bishop demanded a sign proving her message.

Juan related the Bishop's message but was delayed as he had to care for a sick uncle. For this, he was ashamed and tried to avoid Tepeyac only to be confronted on another one of his paths through the hills. He explained that he could not come the day before as his uncle was in his last hour. The Lady then told him that his uncle would not die and gave him the needed proof as she told him to climb the hill and gather some roses growing there. Juan Diego could scarcely believe his eyes as roses were never found on the rocky crags of Tepeyac and furthermore in the dead of winter; however, he found sweet-scented, rare roses of Castile. These he plucked and placed in his tilma and thanking the Lady he ran to show the bishop.

As he ran toward the bishop, Juan Diego tripped, dropping the mantle filled with roses. As they fell to the floor, the roses formed the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Fray Juan de Zumarraga, sandal-shod and in his rough Franciscan robe, sank on his knees and said it was the Mother of God, clothed with the sun and moon at her feet.

Many of our residents of Monterey have visited the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe near Mexico City and

while there have marveled at the beauty of the church built in her honor.

Yes, there is something else we might add. When we visited San Carlos Church there were three women wearing the black rebozos who were praying and singing a beautiful hymn for it was the twelfth of December, the day set aside when the Mexican people honor their beloved Queen of the Americas, Our Lady of Guadalupe.