



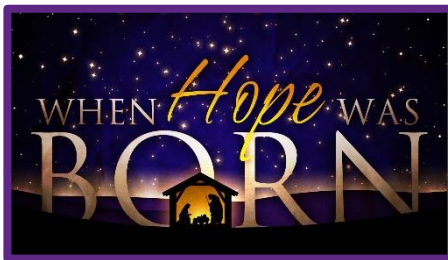
At every Mass following the Lord's prayer we say, "Deliver us Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." This is a great Advent prayer!! In this holy season we await the "joyful hope" – the coming of our Savior. But what exactly is the virtue of hope? Fr. John Hardon's *Catholic Dictionary* defines hope as:

"The confident desire of obtaining a future good that is difficult to attain. It is therefore a desire, which implies seeking and pursuing; some future good that is not yet possessed but wanted, unlike fear that shrinks from a future evil. This future good draws out a person's volition. Hope is confident that what is desired will certainly be attained. It is the opposite of despair. Yet it recognizes that the object wanted is not easily obtained and that it requires effort to overcome whatever obstacles stand in the way."

The two great enemies of Christian hope are despair and presumption. Despair is the anticipation of nonfulfillment. Presumption is a false self-confidence which excludes the need for God's help and mercy. Despair and presumption steal from our soul the strength and joy that we as God's children are meant to possess as the fruit of the wonderful virtue of joyful hope. Our battle against the vices of presumption and despair can only be won by perseverance in prayer. When you think about it, true prayer is simply the expression and exercise of the virtue of hope. Humble and confident prayer acknowledges both our need for God and an expectation of fulfillment. Thus, it counters the great enemies of the soul: presumption and despair.

This Advent, I pray we all grow in the virtue of "joyful hope" through our commitment to perseverance in prayer. It's the perfect time to frequently make simple, prayerful, acts of hope, such as:

"My God, I hope in You, for grace and for glory, because of Your promises, Your mercy, and Your power. Amen."



We all need to fight against the destructive and crippling vices of despair and presumption which are always lurking nearby. In the face of great temptation to despair, the prophet Isaiah captures the power and beauty of the virtue of hope: "Be comforted, be comforted, my people. . . . But they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall take wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint" (Is 40:1,31).

I leave you with the great "Advent prayer" we say at every Mass. This would be a good prayer to commit to memory and repeat often in this holy season: "Deliver us Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." Happy Advent!

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples





Saint Juan Diego

Feast Day: December 9

Born: 1474

Died: May 30, 1548

Canonized: Pope John

Paul II in 2002



Juan Diego was born with the name “Cuauhtlatotzin” (“the talking eagle”) in Cuautlitlan, today part of Mexico City, Mexico. He was a gifted member of the Chichimeca people, one of the more culturally advanced groups living in the Anahuac Valley. Juan Diego and his wife, Maria Lucia, converted to Christianity around age 50. They walked 14 miles to religious instructions and Mass every Saturday and Sunday. On December 9, 1531, when Juan was a 57-year-old widower, he was walking to Mass and a beautiful lady dressed as an Aztec appeared. She told him she was the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of the true God, and she desired to have a shrine built at the Hill of Tepeyac so she could show her love for the people. She said, “Ask for my help. Here I will listen to people's prayers and I will help them.” Mary asked Juan to tell the bishop of her request. According to tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego on four occasions between December 9 and December 12.

When Juan Diego relayed this message to Bishop Juan de Zumarraga. The bishop demanded proof. On December 12, despite it being winter, Mary instructed Juan Diego to gather roses from the hilltop. He picked them and brought them to Mary who arranged them in a cloak that María Lucía had made from cactus fibers. Mary told Juan to take the roses to the bishop. When the bishop saw Juan, he asked what he had in his cloak. Juan opened it, letting the roses fall. Imagine the bishop’s surprise at seeing beautiful roses in the wintertime! Yet he saw an even greater miracle: A beautiful, life-size image appeared on Juan’s cloak. Juan gasped. It was his Lady! The bishop cried out, “The Immaculate!” Then he knelt and with tears asked the Blessed Mother’s pardon for not believing Juan. The image features Mary standing on a crescent moon, with stars on her mantle and an angel at her feet, signifying her divine nature and connection to both heaven and earth.

The first chapel was built per Mary’s request and later became the site of the existing Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and National shrine of Mexico where the cloak is present. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe holds deep symbolic meaning because it depicts Mary as a Mestiza, symbolizing a blend of indigenous and European cultures. This representation played a crucial role in uniting Spanish colonizers and indigenous people under a common religious devotion. Pope John Paul II described Juan Diego as a humble figure who embraced Christianity while maintaining his indigenous identity, facilitating a meeting between two worlds.

The experience of Juan Diego with Our Lady of Guadalupe is not just a religious event but a cultural phenomenon that continues to inspire millions. It represents hope, unity, and faith across cultures and time. The story underscores the power of belief and its ability to transcend cultural barriers, fostering reconciliation and community among diverse peoples. Juan Diego’s name is forever linked with Our Lady of Guadalupe. He remained poor, simple, humble, devoted to the Eucharist, and spent his next 17 years traveling throughout central Mexico bringing others to the faith and delivering Guadalupe’s message that Mary loves us and wants to help us.

Reflection: God counted on Juan Diego to play a humble, yet huge role in bringing the Good News to the people of Mexico. Overcoming his own fear and the doubts of Bishop Juan de Zumarraga, Juan Diego cooperated with God’s grace in showing his people that the Good News of Jesus is for everyone.