

Topic: Giving thanks to La Virgen de Guadalupe.

Abstract: Growing up in Mexico while my father was working in the United States was hard, but our faith kept my family and me strong. When my father would return to Mexico we were all very excited and happy to see him. Being raised in the Catholic faith, we were taught to give thanks to the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe at La Basilica de Guadalupe in Mexico City. Every time my father came back to Mexico, we as a family would make a trip to Mexico City to give our thanks to “La Virgen.” In the Mexican culture, faith is very important and we’re taught to give thanks when our prayers have been answered. For Catholics, December 12 is the day we continue to celebrate the appearance of “La Virgen” and give thanks for her miracles. I hope to continue our family’s tradition of faith for the rest of my life and pass down the traditions to my own family.

Key Words: La Virgen de Guadalupe, Thanking Her, Visit, Faith, Father, Mother and Sisters, Mexico, United States, Catholics, Prayers, La Basilica de Guadalupe.

Ethnic Designation: Mexican

Cultural Category: Catholic Religion

La Basilica de Guadalupe

When I was eighteen years old, I returned to Mexico with my father. It had been ten years since the day I left with my mother and sisters to reunite with him. He had been working and living in the United States since before I was born, so for about ten years, he would only come live with us in Mexico during the fall and winter seasons. He had told my mother that he was tired of living away from his family, just like many immigrants do in search of work for “better” economic opportunities so he brought us to the United States to live with him.

I was excited and nervous about going back. We were going to be spending four weeks in Guanajuato with my paternal grandparents. After a few days, my father told me we would be going Mexico City to visit *La Basilica de Guadalupe*, the shrine to the *Virgin Mary of Guadalupe*. This is the most important place of worship for Catholics in Mexico. This was not new to me because I remember taking a few trips and seeing pictures of our trips there as a child. Every time my father came back to Mexico from the United States we would go visit *La Virgen*. As a child I did not understand the reason for our visits, all I remember was being happy because my father was back and we were spending time with him.

So we got up very early one morning and got ready for the long trip. We would be taking the bus and the trip was going to be about four hours long. Once we got to the city, we would have to rely on public transportation (el metro), which was very crowded. Going from a small town like Gilroy to the one of the largest cities in the world was a shocking experience; it was loud and crowded, an overwhelming experience for sure. But once we finally arrived I knew that it had all been worth it.

I thought of the stories that we all hear about, the importance of going back to visit our mother (*La Virgen de Guadalupe*) to thank her for everything. It was then when I was able to understand why it was that we took those trips as a child. My father had to go thank her for bringing him back to his family, to his country after many months of hard work and sacrifice. I did not ask my father what he was thanking *La Virgen* for but I had an idea. My father had a few accidents in the decade that we had been living with him in the United States, so I knew that he was there to thank her for his health and for the opportunity to recover from his accidents. This time without saying a word, I joined him in thanking her for the opportunity of going back to Mexico, for being there with her, but most of all to thank her for our family.

There, we were able to walk in front of the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe, the line was long but it was well organized. I had the opportunity to go in to one of the private prayer rooms with a group of people. There, we prayed and had the opportunity to have the priest bless the images/souvenirs. We found ourselves surrounded by vendors. Anything you could think of with the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe, Pope John Paul II and Jesus Christ was for sale, from key chains, to statues, postcards, etc. It was important for us to bring souvenirs, a special item that had been blessed for each member of our family that had stayed back home.

La Basilica was crowded with locals and tourists from all over the world. It is amazing to see firsthand, a place where people from all walks of life and economic statuses come together as one. I can honestly say that this is one of the few times in my life that I have seen this happen. It is not every day that we have the opportunity to see indigenous people sitting next to and even holding hands in prayer with a wealthy person. Some people walked, others advanced on their knees as a penitence, to thank or ask her to listen to their prayers. Faith was what brought all of those people together as one.

The stories one hears from people there are fascinating, people actually walk or ride their bikes for days, even weeks to be able to thank or ask their prayers be heard. There, one also hears of healings and other “miracles” that the Virgin has made. Even though many of these have not been proven or accepted by the Catholic Church, people have faith and that is what takes them there. Going there is not only a practice of faith, but a major cultural practice of Catholic Mexicans. Celebrating the anniversary of her appearance (December 12) is such an important part of the Mexican culture that it is celebrated in parishes all over the United States. The faith is passed on from generation to generation regardless of where people live. I am definitely planning

a family vacation with my own children to visit *La Basílica de Guadalupe*. I wish to continue our family tradition of faith that will keep them close to our Mexican culture.