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Cleric brings message of justice, devotion to Mexico's famed Virgin

By Carmen Duarte

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Monsignor Diego Monroy, vicar general and episcopal of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, says he is on a mission to promote devotion to the Blessed Mother in the Americas.

"It is fascinating to see how the Virgin of Guadalupe touches hearts and changes lives," said Monroy, rector since 1999 of the most visited Catholic shrine in the world.

Monroy met with Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas this month and gave a presentation about the Virgin Mary to Spanish-speaking priests of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tucson at the Downtown Bishop Moreno Pastoral Center.

Monroy plans to return to Tucson in December 2008 for a diocesan celebration honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe, tentatively set at the Tucson Convention Center.

"Today, we have to be Juan Diegos of Our Lady of Guadalupe in this third millennium," Monroy said in an interview. He said the faithful have to seek justice for the oppressed, work toward ending discrimination and treat immigrants with dignity.

The faithful believe the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, an Aztec who converted to Catholicism, in several visions on the outskirts of Mexico City in 1531.

The Virgin Mary spoke to Juan Diego in Nahuatl, his native language. She asked him to go see the bishop of Mexico City and tell him to build a church in her honor on a nearby spot, Tepeyac Hill.

Juan Diego obeyed but could not convince the bishop. Discouraged, he told the Virgin Mary that he was unsuccessful and that she should send someone else to the bishop. But the Virgin Mary sent him back to the bishop again.

Juan Diego went, and the bishop told him to bring back a sign. Juan Diego reported this to the Virgin Mary, and she directed him to the top of the hill, where he found roses growing despite the cold winter weather.

He picked the roses and wrapped them in his cloak, or *tilma*. When he presented the roses to the bishop, they discovered that the image of the Virgin Mary had appeared on the cloak. The bishop immediately began to work to build the church.

The tilma with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is on display under bulletproof glass in the basilica.

The feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe is Dec. 12, and the feast day of St. Juan Diego is Dec. 9. He was declared a saint in 2002 by Pope John Paul II.

'08 Celebration set for the Virgin of Guadalupe

Monsignor Diego Monroy, vicar general and episcopal of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, visited with Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas and gave a presentation about the dark-skinned Virgin Mary to Spanish-speaking priests of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tucson.

The discussions took place Nov. 16 at the Downtown Bishop Moreno Pastoral Center, which houses the administrative offices of the diocese.

Monroy plans to return in December 2008 for a diocesan celebration honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe. The event is tentatively set at the Tucson Convention Center.

The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe attracts about 20 million visitors a year, said Monroy, 59, who has been rector of the shrine for seven years. Thirty Masses are celebrated at the basilica daily, and 700,000 confessions are heard there each year.

"My work there is fascinating. There is music, dance, flowers and song every day in the basilica. She touches men, women, children and the elderly. She touches people from all walks of life — from agricultural workers to politicians.

"She touches hearts and changes lives. Some come with hate and resentment. Some come with sadness and fear. They change while they are there and leave with peace in their heart. It is incredible," said Monroy.

Monroy has held spiritual and historical workshops about the Virgin of Guadalupe in the United States since 2001. He has given presentations in California, Texas, Illinois, Michigan and Washington, D.C.

After the presentation, the Rev. Viliulfo Valderrama said he felt more connected to his Mexican origin and ancestry. "I feel more motivated to spread the good news and philosophical message to my people," said the native of Puebla, Mexico, who was ordained in 1996. He is assigned to San Felipe de Jesus Parish in Nogales, Ariz.

"The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is increasingly becoming a universal symbol," Valderrama said.

The Rev. Raúl Trevizo, vicar general of the diocese, said, "Our Lady of Guadalupe reveals herself as the mother of God to all people on this continent. Her face is an amalgamation of all the human race, and she reveals the love of God through the kindness and gentleness of her face."

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