



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS FOR THE TWINNING OF THE SHRINES OF GUADALUPE

*To His Most Reverend Excellency
Archbishop Francisco Cerro Chaves of Toledo*

Dear brother:

It is with great joy that I wish to send you my greetings on the occasion of the twinning of the two shrines dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I ask you to extend this greeting first of all to His Eminence Cardinal Carlos Aguiar Retes, Archbishop of Mexico City, and, together with him, to all the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and faithful who have wished to place themselves at the feet of the Most Blessed Virgin on this day, as one holy People of God.

Mary, our Mother, is always a bond of communion for her People. Both Scripture and apostolic tradition show her gathering the apostles and the community around her in an atmosphere of prayer. This is how Saint Luke expresses it in the Acts of the Apostles: “All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (1:14). This founding experience of the first Christian community transcends time and place, and the Mother of Jesus, in a simple way, continues to call to us. This has been expressed in many places in the world with the invitation to build a temple that would be a house with doors always open to all, a house of prayer and communion.

Today you are gathered by the sweet name of Mary, more precisely, an ancient invocation which even in its etymological root speaks to us of *mestizaje* [fusion], of encounter with God and with mankind. *Mestizaje* because scholars cannot agree whether we should read the title “Guadalupe” in Arabic, Latin or Nahuatl. But it is curious that what could be seen as a conflict can in fact be read as a sign from the Holy Spirit who makes his message of love heard to all in their own language. Thus, in Arabic the word could sound like “hidden river”, as was that source of living

water that Jesus promised to the Samaritan woman, that force of grace that, even in times of rejection and misunderstanding, keeps the Church alive (cf. *Jn* 4:10). As shepherds, this allusion should spur us to always seek in the other that hidden river of grace, that Love of God which makes him or her a priceless treasure. Everything would change if, like Our Lady, we could see in the other that hidden secret; how many setbacks and conflicts we would avoid!

However, mixing with the Latin, the word would speak to us of a “river of wolves” and, in that sense, of a haven of peace for those who are troubled by their own sins, by violence, by the many internal and external wars that make man a wolf to man. It is the same hidden river of grace that in dialogue with Jesus shows us our reality (v. 29), opening us to hope. Like with Saint Francis, in his famous encounter with the wolf, the Virgin Mary again challenges us to be a leaven of communion and reconciliation between God and mankind, encouraging so many of the faithful who come to the shrine for this purpose.

Finally, combining with the Mexican root, Our Lady of Guadalupe is proclaimed as the one who conquers the serpent, with a touching evocation of the proto-gospel of Genesis. Mary Immaculate is thus the true mother of all those who live; of those who have been called together today in this shrine, together with their pastors, to proclaim their faith in the Son of God, in he who, by making all things new, has reconciled the world to himself. I encourage you to bring forth in the hearts of the men and women of our time that river of living water which surges toward heaven, to worship God in Spirit and Truth (cf. vv. 14, 23).

Dear brothers and sisters,

In every historical moment, in every culture, the Gospel, while remaining always the same, is enriched in meaning. Far from discarding, it includes every person who welcomes it. Let us ask God that, in every time and place where Mary our Mother calls us, we may bear witness to that intimate union of which only the Spirit can be the creator.

May Jesus bless you and the Holy Virgin watch over you. And please, I ask you to pray for me.

Fraternally yours,

Francis

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