

National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples of Canada

The Catholic Aboriginal Council for Reconciliation was created by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) in 1998 to provide resources to increase awareness of aboriginal issues, to support processes of healing and to foster aboriginal faith leadership in the Christian community. In 2002, this Council recommended that each year December 12 be a National Day of Prayer for Aboriginal People. This is a fitting date as it is the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe who is recognized as Our Lady of the Americas.

When the Blessed Mother appeared to Juan Diego between December 9, 10 and 12, 1531, she spoke to him in compassionate terms. She used the words *my most abandoned son* in her dialogue contained in the *Nican Mophua*. Juan Diego did not feel that he was worthy to be the messenger for her to make representations to Bishop Juan de Zumarraga. In fact, when the Bishop would not believe Juan Diego that he met Mary and gave him the message, Juan Diego felt very dejected. He asked Mary to send someone else more important and worthy. Again, Mary told him that she could send someone else. However, she told him that he was her choice to have him speak to the Bishop, so that her desire to have a chapel built where people could be comforted by her, would become a reality. Mary was very much aware of the abuse that Juan Diego and his people were receiving from the conquering Spaniards.

On the morning of December 12, 1531, the Blessed Mother asked Juan Diego to gather the flowers on Tepeyac Hill, to bring them to her, so that she could rearrange them in his cloak. She then asked Juan Diego to deliver these flowers, gathered in his tilma, as a sign for the Bishop. She called Juan Diego her ambassador in whom she had complete trust. Her words to him were *with all of my strength, I command you that only in the presence of the bishop are you to open your mantle, and let him know and reveal to him what you are carrying. You will recount everything well; you will tell him how I sent you to climb to the top of the hill to cut flowers, and all you saw and admired. With this you will change the heart of the lord of the priests so that he will do his part to build and erect a temple that I have asked for.* Through her miraculous Image and the acceptance of Mary's message, in a short period of ten years [1531-1541], there were nine million conversions to the Catholic faith by the indigenous people of Mexico. Mary's appearance succeeded where the missionaries and Spaniards failed in convincing the indigenous people to become followers of Jesus.

This is the eight year of this celebration. Now, this date has been renamed as the **National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples in Canada**. Pope John Paul II visited Canada in 1984. In his speech in Huronia, Ontario, on September 15, 1984, he told the gathered aboriginal people that: **Thus the one faith is expressed in different ways. There can be no question of adulterating the word of God or of emptying the Cross of its power, but rather of Christ animating the very centre of all culture. Thus, not only is Christianity relevant to the Indian peoples, but Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself Indian.**

On this day of December 12, 2014, we are encouraged to gather in prayer and celebrate our indigenous identity with our Catholic faith and be grateful of those who minister to our spiritual needs and to pray for all of our brothers and sisters.

~Graydon Nicholas