**The Story of Our Lady of Guadalupe: A Finding Near a Little River in Spain**

There was a statue of the Black Madonna reputed to have been carved by Saint Luke the Evangelist. The statue came to be in the possession of Pope Gregory the Great. Upon the Gregory's death the statue was given to Saint Leander, archbishop of Seville, with whom Gregory had become great friends years prior in Constantinople. When the Moors took Seville in 711, a group of priests fled northward and buried the statue in the hills near the Guadalupe River in Extremadura. In 1326, Gil Cordero, a humble herder in an area near the Guadalupe River, went looking for one of his cows. When he found the animal dead, he began to skin it for the leather. Gil made the first cross-shaped incision, and the cow sprang back to life. At that moment, the Virgin Mary appeared to Gil. She instructed him to go home and tell the local clerics of his vision and to have them return to the place where the cow had lain. The men were to dig there, find an image of the Virgin, and build a shrine on the spot to house the image. When Gil went home, he found that one of his sons had died. Gil prayed to the Virgin Mary, and the boy came back to life. This helped convince the clerics that Gil’s story of the apparition was true, and they dug up an iron casket with a perfectly preserved statue of the Black Madonna, along with documents attesting her origins, in other words, evidence of the statue’s provenance. They then built a small sanctuary for her on the spot.

**Columbus and Our Lady of Guadalupe**

It was at the monastery that the Spanish monarchs Isabel and Ferdinand signed documents that authorized the first voyage of Christopher Columbus to the New World in 1492. Isabella had prayed at the foot of the Black Madonna for guidance on whether to finance Columbus's journey. Columbus went to the monastery to pray for a safe voyage. He named his ship the Santa Maria in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe. When Columbus returned to Spain, he traveled to the monastery to thank the Virgin for her help and protection. He also took with him Native Americans whom he had brought back to Spain. In the public square of the town of Guadalupe, with water from the public fountain, these first visitors from the New World were baptized.

**The Vision in the New World**

The veneration for Our Lady of Guadalupe crossed the ocean, and was established by miracles in Mexico, a country totally devoted to the Mother of God. The magnificent captain, Hernan Cortez, conquered the Aztec Empire, paving the way for Our Lady of Guadalupe. Cortez himself was from Extremadura, so it should be no surprise that the Blessed Virgin should identify herself to the Indian, Saint Juan Diego, as Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The Miraculous Appearance in the New World is long- standing and constant in tradition, and in sources both oral and written, Indian and Spanish, the account is unwavering. The Blessed Virgin appeared on Saturday 9 December 1531 to a 55-year-old neophyte named Juan Diego, who was hurrying down the hill to hear Mass in Mexico City.

Thus, Guadalupe has been adapted to the needs of contemporary agendas. In a very real sense, the Virgin of Tepeyac was reinvented by successive generations to meet the demands of a new orthodoxy.

Many Mexicans aren’t aware that the original Guadalupe is from Extremadura, Spain. In fact, Christopher Columbus was a devotee and even named the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe in her honor, after she purportedly saved his fleet from a storm at sea. The Spanish Guadalupe is one of several Black European virgins, so in her Mexican incarnation she actually became lighter in complexion as the Virgin Morena.

While devotion to her grew during the Spanish colonial era, it was independence from Spain that really transformed her into the national patroness that she is today. Guadalupe was an integral part of the world’s first great popular rebellion of the twentieth century, the Mexican Revolution (1910-20). Fighting under the slogan “land and liberty,” revolutionary peasant leader Emiliano Zapata and his fighters carried the Mestiza Virgin on banners into battle against Mexican oligarchs.

In 1907, the Virgin of Guadalupe was canonically crowned and declared the Patroness of Extremadura. Our Lady’s patronage was extended in 1928 to the entire Spanish-speaking world. In 1955, Pope Pius XII declared the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe a minor papal basilica.