

**Pastoral Message from the Catholic Aboriginal Council for Reconciliation for the
National Day of Prayer for Aboriginal Peoples**

Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe

December 12, 2007

1. When the Blessed Mother appeared to Juan Diego on 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 had 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.
2. 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 among the indigenous people of Mexico. Mary's appearance succeeded where the missionaries and Spaniards had failed in convincing the indigenous people to become followers of Jesus.
3. Pope John Paul II visited Canada in 1984. On September 10, he met with Aboriginal Peoples who gathered at the Shrine of Saint Anne de Beaupré. He told them:

Your encounter with the Gospel has not only enriched you, it has enriched the Church. We are well aware that this has not taken place without its difficulties and, occasionally, its blunders. However, and you are experiencing this today, the Gospel does not destroy what is best in you. On the contrary, it enriches as it were from within the spiritual qualities and gifts that are distinctive of your culture. In addition your Amerindian and Inuit traditions permit the development of new ways of expressing the message of salvation and they help us

better understand to what point Jesus is the Saviour and how universal his salvation is.

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4. Pope John Paul II spoke at the canonization of Juan Diego on July 31, 2002, and reminded the assembled faithful that:

The Guadalupe Event, as the Mexican Episcopate has pointed out, "meant the beginning of evangelization with a vitality that surpassed all expectations. Christ's message, through his Mother, took up the central elements of the indigenous culture, purified them and gave them the definitive sense of salvation" (14 May 2002, No. 8). Consequently Guadalupe and Juan Diego have a deep ecclesial and missionary meaning and are a model of perfectly inculturated evangelization. In accepting the Christian message without forgoing his indigenous identity, Juan Diego discovered the profound truth of the new humanity, in which all are called to be children of God.

5. This year we have witnessed the conclusion of a chapter in the lives of Aboriginal Peoples who had attended the residential schools which were established by the federal government and the Churches. The compensation has begun to be paid to the former students, their families and their communities. We know that the financial resources will not be the sole aspect that will result in healing. There is now an opportunity to continue a path of reconciliation and peace in this sacred journey. It will not be an easy journey. However, the need for spiritual healing will be on-going. We are reminded in the Old Testament by the Prophet **Isaiah** who spoke about the *suffering servant [Jesus]* in 53:5,

Yet he was pierced through our faults, crushed for our sins. On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed.

6. This same passage is repeated in **1 Peter 2:24** in the New Testament. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus. We need to gather with our fellow Christians to walk together in a path toward reconciliation. There is need for leadership from the Bishops, priests and Aboriginal elders to work together so that we can become whole and complete once again. We need to return to the spiritual teachings that our Creator gave to our elders. These sacred teachings must be recognized and accepted by our Christian brothers and sisters. Pope John Paul II's message of the inculturation of our spiritual values in the Catholic Church which began on December 12, 1531, with Mary's encounter with Juan Diego must be fulfilled. Each one of us is being called by Mary, **Our Lady of Guadalupe**, to be her *ambassadors* to welcome Jesus in our lives. On this fifth anniversary of the **National Day of Prayer for Aboriginal Peoples** in Canada, we will unite in prayer and spiritual solidarity as we celebrate in various ways the evangelization of our past. We are once again reminded that on the feast day of **Our Lady of Guadalupe**, on December 12, 2007, she is our **Mother of the Americas**. She wants us to follow her Son, **Jesus**.