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## Official Welcome of His Excellency Patrick F. Flores

Patrick F. Flores

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## OFFICIAL WELCOME\*

### THE MOST REVEREND PATRICK F. FLORES *Archbishop of San Antonio*

\*The above address, delivered by Archbishop Flores at the opening of the 33rd annual convention of the Mariological Society of America, has also been published in the March-April 1982 issue of QUEEN, which carried a summary of the MSA convention.

I would like to welcome you first to Texas, secondly to San Antonio, and thirdly to *Casa San José*. Because we knew that most of you were coming from cold humid areas, we ordered this beautiful weather for you, to give you a chance to dry out, and to build up and renew yourselves with the energies which the S-U-N and the S-O-N give to us. Indeed, I am privileged to extend personal greetings and the welcomes of the Archdiocese and of *Casa San José*.

Briefly, I would like to share with you an experience that I had a few days ago. Father Elizondo and I made a two-day retreat with the *Guadalupinas*, the ladies that belong to the Society of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The ladies themselves had asked that on one of the days, we discuss with them only "Mary in the Bible," and the second day that we discuss Mary and Tepeyac and Our Lady of Guadalupe. So we decided that rather than take a scriptural passage and tell them what we think it means, we would simply read the passage, take some ten minutes for reflection, and then ask each and everyone of them to write down in two sentences whatever they got out of the reflection on the passage; then we would call on four or five, from either side, to share with us whatever they had written.

I was very impressed when one of the ladies said, "You know,

really, the Bible says very little about Mary. The reason why so little is said is because it was superfluous to say more. In the little that we say, in the little that the Spirit says, it says all that it needs to say." And I thought she put it so beautifully and so precisely, it was really a shot in the arm.

But, then, the second lady got up and said, and this was in reference to the dialogue of Mary with the Angel, she said: "For the first time, I see Mary being a 'fearful' woman." The word we use in Spanish connotes something maybe more powerful, something like *miedosa*. A woman "full of fear," and I guess, if I had thought of it, I would have never had the courage to say it, but she said: "*Maria era una mujer miedosa*. Because the Angel himself says it, 'Be not afraid.' However, Mary did not allow fear to be an obstacle to carrying out the will of the Lord." And in the application that she made about it, which I thought was very powerful, she said, we are also fearful people. But we use fear as an excuse not to carry out what we know is the will of the Lord.

So you see, in Mary we have a model of someone who is just as human as we are and consequently fearful; but one who is willing to conquer, to overcome the fear in order to do the will of the Lord.

So, the big resolution at the end of the two-day retreat was that we have a lot to do in the Church, for the Church and with the Church, and we cannot allow fear to be the obstacle, or to be the excuse, for not getting involved. Mary did not allow fear to be the excuse for non-involvement. She overcame it and was so involved, that she gave us the Word Incarnate, the Son of God.

And then, one of the ladies told us a joke, which she said she had heard from an Irish priest. One day an Irish mama, who had 10 children, came to see the priest because she was really depressed. She was having trouble with each one of them. Running late, dancing too much, and this, and that, and the other. And the poor Irish mother just couldn't see her way out. And so the priest immediately said: "Turn to Mary. You know, Mary is your model. Mary is the model of all mamas." And the woman responded in her own Irish way, "How can she be my model? She only had one, and I have ten." And the Irish priest respond-

ed: "She only had one Son; oh, but what a Son she had!"

I think you can take that in many different ways! On the one hand, yes, the great, the Son of God, the Savior, the Redeemer. But what the Irish priest meant was that every time He opened his mouth, He got into trouble. There were those who liked what He said and those who did not like what He said; and Mary was there; and surely there is no pain for a Mama greater than that one caused by the Son being put down. And she knew he was going to be put down, because Simeon had said it, way at the beginning, right after the Christmas celebrations were over. She had to meet this man who kind of, in a sense, squashed her, saying, "Seven swords will transpierce your heart and He, your Son, will be the cause of division. On account of Him some will be saved and some will not be."

And so this lady said: "It is true Mary only had one Son, but what a Son she had, and because she had such a Son, she was able to be not only the model of Mamas, but she is able to be the model of priests, she is able to be the model of nuns, she is able to be everybody's model."

I am sure that you will deal with that, and that you will continue to do so at this meeting and at future meetings. I, for one, together with the people of San Antonio and the people of Latin America and the people of the United States, am celebrating a great event: 450 years ago, Our Lady came to us in a very special way. I like to think that if there is any parallel in history to the parallel of Mary going to visit her cousin Elizabeth, that the descriptions of Tepeyac parallel the descriptions of that particular visit. That Mary went to her cousin in order to give her help, in order to give her encouragement, *animo*, and in order to give her the Lord. When you read the history of the conversion of Mexico, you see that it took place because Mary came to us to bring us encouragement, to give us *animo*—and a conquered people need *animo* more than any other kind of people, and we were at a time when we did need that *animo*. But, also, we needed help and we needed the Lord. And Mary came to Tepeyac bringing the three things. For that reason, it is interesting that Mexico claims nobody as our patron saint, not even the

Franciscans who did so much, because our patroness is Mary, the Mother of the Lord. We claim no one as our apostle, because our apostle is Mary. We claim no one as our Queen, because Mary is our Queen; and no one is our empress. You know, we only had one who attempted to become our empress and she went out of her mind. (I think she came from France.) She couldn't take the place in the hearts of the people that only belonged to Mary, the Mother of the Lord.

We are celebrating 450 years of that particular relationship of Mary with the people of the Americas. Lately, as you know, the Holy Father and the bishops of Mexico have given permission to scientists to photograph, to analyze, and to study the *tilma*. The more they study it, the more they analyze it, the more they themselves conclude that it is "miraculous," and that only those who don't believe it have the task of proving that it isn't. I am not so concerned about the *tilma* being or not being miraculous, because I am convinced it is. However, the thing that is for me a shot in the arm is that the older this event becomes the greater the attraction. Very often I use that as a proof to non-believers: to so many who would say that it was the fabrication of some smart Franciscans who produced it to confuse the Indians. I don't think they were that smart, you know, to do this! But if it had been, I really think that the attraction would have lost its appeal by now, because how often have we not had somebody here, and somebody there, claiming something miraculous and people go there by the hundreds, and they go there by the thousands, but then the number begins to dwindle and after a while nobody is there.

The event of Guadalupe is 450 years old. We, the bishops of Texas, the Hispanic bishops and a few others were there this past October 12 to celebrate this anniversary, and again, while I have seen big crowds there before, the crowds on October 12 were even bigger. And so the power of Mary continues to grow in the hearts of men and of women because, as I was saying previously, Mary continues to be the woman of all time and for all people.