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Growing Devotion

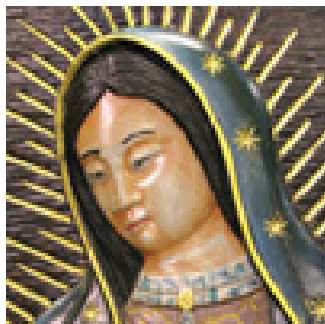
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Growing Devotion

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With the growing Hispanic population in the U.S., devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, an icon of Mary the mother of Jesus and the patron saint of Mexico, will be increasingly visible on her feast day, Monday, Dec. 12.

"She's hugely evident — painted statues, cultural festivals, shrines — throughout the U.S. and especially in cities with large Mexican populations like Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle and Detroit," said Judith Huacuja, a Chicana professor of art history at the University of Dayton. "I can walk into any church supply store and see her more and more."

The haloed image of Guadalupe graces calendars in Mexican restaurants. Taxicabs carry small shrines to her and sport her bumper stickers. The faithful light Guadalupe candles and direct their prayers to her in churches throughout the U.S.

"With the increased number of Hispanics in the United States, she's taken on new importance," said the Rev. Thomas Thompson, S.M., director of the University of Dayton's Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, which studies how Mary is venerated throughout the world and holds the largest collection in the world devoted to her.

The story of the Our Lady of Guadalupe apparition dates to 1531, when Mary appeared to peasant Juan Diego in Mexico City, directing him to tell a local priest to build a church in her honor. The first two times Diego went to the priest, he didn't believe him. But the third time, Mary took Diego's *tilma*, or cape, and filled it with roses. When Diego opened his cape to the priest, the roses spilled out, revealing a full image of Mary imprinted on the cape.

That cape is now the centerpiece of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, with 20 million visitors annually, the most visited Marian shrine in the world, second only to St. Peter's in the Vatican.

Guadalupe was an important symbol for revolutionary Mexicans fighting oppression and seeking independence, and remains the most important symbol of Mexican culture.

Huacuja said it's understandable that Mexican immigrants have brought Guadalupe to the U.S.

"Her image communicates great compassion for the suffering of the poor, the marginalized or anyone who has felt put aside," she said. "The Mexican tradition is that if you pray to Mary, she will hear your prayers; she will be your go-between and she will deliver your prayer directly to Christ," she said.

Huacuja said much art about the migrant experience shows her image, such as a migrant sleeping in the desert, with Guadalupe in the sky keeping watch.

The Marian Library has many versions — paintings, prints, statues, stamps — of Guadalupe's distinctive image, he said. Dark-skinned, she is always portrayed with a *mandorla*, a halo that shines from her entire body, and most often in a blue cape with gold stars and a rose-colored dress.

The Mary Page, the Marian Library's website (<http://udayton.edu/mary> (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/mary>)) is a rich source for Our Lady of Guadalupe information, resources, images and prayers. Spanish-language prayers to her are found on the Spanish version of the website, which sees an increase in visitors as her feast day approaches.

The popularity of Our Lady of Guadalupe follows the growth of the Hispanic population of the U.S. A National Catholic Reporter survey released in October found that one-third of all Catholics report Hispanic heritage, up from 10 percent in 1987. Most Hispanic Catholics have Mexican ancestry and a large number are recent immigrants, the survey said.

Thompson said that growing presence in the U.S. can be a bridge between Hispanic and Anglo cultures.

This was emphasized in 1999, when Pope John Paul II declared Guadalupe the Evangelizer of America. This distinction "expressed a fond wish that the differences between the north and south would be overcome by having one mother," said

Thompson.

"It's a rallying call, gives us a sense of identity and inclusion for all those not in mainstream American culture," he said.