

- While there is a penitential element to Advent, our Advent penance is punctuated repeatedly by some very joyful feast days.
- Just this week alone we celebrate 3 beautiful feast days in honor of Our Lady: the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Loreto, and, today in this Rorate Mass: Our Lady of Guadalupe.
- Yet for all the joy of this season, let us not forget that there is battle being fought: a war between good and evil whose battlefield is the souls of men.
- For each of us must determine over and over again to whom we will give dominion over our souls, and consequently our salvation.
- If we truly desire for the Light of the World to take dominion over our souls and banish the darkness that is within them, we must be confident in God and willing to fight and suffer the wounds such warfare invariably brings.
- This is a battle we fight not with our own strength, but with the strength of God that comes us through recourse to prayer, the Sacraments, fasting and penance. And it's a battle that will press upon us as long as we have breath.
- Yet know this: we are not alone in the battle! For our Lady is at our side!
- In this dimly lit setting, as we together prepare to honor the Light of the World, Who is soon to be born, we also offer praise to God for the gift of Our Lady, whose *fiat* in Nazareth secured our redemption and dealt the devil a fatal blow.
- Truly, we should rejoice in Mary because without her there would be no Incarnation, and thus no salvation. Without Mary's obedience, there would be no Advent because there would be no Christmas!
- For our Blessed Mother is absolutely necessary for our salvation. Just as we could not live on this earth without the role of our biological mothers, neither can we hope to live eternally in Heaven without the role of our spiritual mother.
- Note well that Mary's work on earth did not end when she gave birth to her Son. Her work on earth did not end when her Son died on the cross. It did not even end when she herself was assumed into Heaven.
- From her throne in Heaven where she reigns as queen, Mary continues to intercede for us, securing for us the graces we need to be faithful followers of her son. Mary intercedes for us so that we can cooperate with God's grace and become holy. Mary intercedes for us so that we can become God's adopted children and inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Moreover, from time to time, she has appeared around the world to proclaim our Lord's healing love and liberation, and to direct people to turn to her Son.
- Today we celebrate the anniversary of Our Lady appearing to St. Juan Diego in 1531 – giving him roses and miraculously imprinting her image on his tilma.

- And while we Catholics believe Mary has appeared to many people throughout history, this particular apparition of Our Lady stands out in a couple of ways.
- First of all, the Virgin's appearance at Tepayac, a hill northwest of Mexico City, was her first appearance in the New World.
- And it was an appearance that changed the history of the Americas. Just 9 years after the apparitions to St. Juan Diego, more than 9 million people in that area of Mexico, who for centuries had professed a religion that practiced human sacrifice, had converted to Christianity!
- What an extraordinary thing! Never before have so many people converted in such a short period of time.
- And even today, nearly 500 years after the apparitions at Tepayac, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe remains second only to the Vatican in the number of pilgrims that she receives each year – about 10 million per year.
- Our Lady's apparitions at Tepeyac also stand out because they may well be the most unique historical development in the Western Hemisphere.
- She appeared less than 40 years after Christopher Columbus first set foot in the New World, at the very dawn of the history of the Americas, greatly increasing the spread of Christianity in the Americas.
- Without her appearances to St. Juan Diego and the miracle she performed, the Faith would never have spread through the Americas as it did – ample reason for Our Lady of Guadalupe to be named Patroness of the Americas by Pope St. John Paul II in 1999.
- But there's another aspect to the Virgin's appearance at Tepayac worth noting. When she appeared, she did so as a pregnant woman. As such, it is very appropriate that we celebrate this feast during the season of Advent.
- Advent is a season of hope and expectation; a time of waiting: both for Christ's coming as a man in the Incarnation, and His second coming at the end of time.
- In the same way, every pregnancy is also a time of hope and expectation of the child who will soon be born. Just like the season of Advent, pregnancy is a time of preparation and waiting.
- Thus the Virgin pregnant with our Savior, whom we so eagerly await, is for us Catholics our great sign of hope. Her pregnancy tells us clearly that the Lord is coming soon, bringing peace and salvation to all His people.
- My friends, on this very special day in which we honor Our Lady, let us turn to her with our love and veneration as we continue to prepare for the coming of her Son. Let us also turn to her with our prayers and concerns.
- As our loving mother, she is eager to help us in our current struggles and trials. She has procured countless miracles throughout history for her faithful children. Let us place our trust in her that she will also intercede for us too!
- Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us!