

- For the past several days, we've been enjoying a special "Marian interlude" in our Advent liturgies. Last Wednesday, of course, was the marvelous Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Friday, December 10th was the feast of Our Lady of Loreto.
- Yesterday, we celebrated our annual Rorate Mass, which is an early-morning Mass honoring Our Lady that takes place completely by candlelight.
- And today, December 12th, marks the 490th anniversary of the miracle of Our Lady of Guadalupe, when Mary appeared to St. Juan Diego – giving him roses and imprinting her image on his tilma.
- Very providentially, today is also "Gaudete Sunday", our Sunday of particular rejoicing when we celebrate that Advent is more than halfway over, and our Lord is so very near!
- So, in addition to rejoicing that our Lord is near, we should also honor Our Lady as a cause for our rejoicing.
- Non-Catholics may wonder why we devote so much time and energy to Mary, why we have so many feasts and celebrations in her honor. Yet as Catholics, we know that the Blessed Virgin Mary is no passive spectator in salvation history.
- Mary is not incidental to man's redemption. In fact, she's quite the opposite.
- The Virgin Mary is the Mother of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. She was chosen by God from all eternity to be the vessel through which He would become man. And through her obedience our Savior was brought into the world so that He might save us from our sins.
- Yet Mary didn't just give birth to Jesus and raise Him. Conceived without original sin so that she might be worthy to be our Lord's living tabernacle, Mary nonetheless lived a completely sinless life, a life that was in every way perfectly united with God's holy will.
- God preserved her from sin at the first moment of her conception, but Mary chose, she willed to remain sinless through the entirety of her life.
- To be sure, Mary is no ordinary woman, and no one has ever rivaled her holiness.
- And 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. Truly, my friends, our Blessed Mother is absolutely necessary for our salvation. We need her.
- We need her motherly intercession now to help protect us from evil and guide us toward her Son, just as we needed her to submit to being the Mother of Jesus Christ at the Annunciation.
- Therefore, it is most appropriate that we rejoice in her today on this Gaudete Sunday, as we celebrate this special day of rejoicing in anticipation of our Lord's arrival.
- And despite any Protestant protestations to the contrary, it is right and just for us to honor Mary so richly in Advent as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the wonderful feast of Christmas.
- For Mary was not merely a vessel to bring forth the Savior, and her work on earth did not end when she gave birth to her Son. Mary's role in man's redemption 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. Like a good mother, she constantly works to help save us.

- In fact, the Church recognizes that 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.
- She appeared in 1830 in a convent in Paris to St. Catherine Laboure to encourage devotion to the Miraculous Medal. She appeared in La Salette, France in 1846 to warn people of impending famines and plagues.
- She appeared in 1858 in Lourdes, France to confirm that she was immaculately conceived, and in 1917 she appeared in Fatima, Portugal, to warn the world against the evils of Communism.
- More recently, she appeared in Rwanda in the early 1980s to warn of the impending genocide that would overtake that country in 1994. These are just a few of her appearances in history.
- And today we celebrate Our Lady's appearance in 1531 at Tepeyac, a hill northwest of Mexico City, where she identified herself as the Mother of the True God and instructed that a basilica be built on that site.
- And as in so many of the places where she has appeared, countless miracles and cures have taken place at this site.
- In fact, by 1540, just nine years after the apparitions to St. Juan Diego, more than nine million people in that area of Mexico, who for centuries had professed a religion that practiced human sacrifice, had converted to Catholicism!
- What an extraordinary thing! Never before have so many people converted in such a short period of time – and all because of Our Lady!
- Truly, I don't think we can overestimate the impact Our Lady's at Tepeyac appearance had on the spread of Christianity in the Americas.
- Without her appearances to St. Juan Diego and the miracle she performed, Christianity would never have spread through the Americas as it did.
- One very beautiful element about this particular apparition of Our Lady is that, when Mary appeared in Tepeyac, 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. It is a time of waiting. In particular we are waiting for Christ's coming as a man in the Incarnation, and we also await His second coming at the end of time.
- In the same way, 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. This is why we rejoice today!
- 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 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!