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# **“What she has done will be told in memory of her”**

Pope Francis said that sanctity is the “the most attractive face of the Church,” her most authentic image. An article about Blessed Guadalupe, whose feast day is on May 18.

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In Bethany, three kilometers from Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples are eating dinner in the home of a friendly family. Suddenly a woman

enters holding in her hand a small alabaster flask. These translucent stone jars were often elaborately decorated, with a narrow neck so that only a few drops of the liquid inside would pour out. Its shape made it especially useful for holding perfumes or ointments. The woman had filled the flask with *ointment of pure nard, very costly* (Mk 14:3).

She comes up to Jesus and breaks the flask, probably at its narrowest point. She could have chosen to pour only a few drops on Christ, without needing to break it: just enough to make her gratitude to the Master known publicly. But her heart demands more, and she pour out all the precious ointment over Jesus' head.

The room is filled with the aroma of nard, giving testimony to the woman's love. And Jesus is moved to say: *Truly, I say to you, wherever this*

*gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her (Mt 26:13).*

## **With all my strength**

We can apply these words of our Lord to Blessed Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri and to all the men and women whom the Church has raised to the altars: throughout the whole world what they have done is and will be told in memory of them. Benedict XVI once recalled the women Jesus met on his way who put their lives at the service of the Gospel: the prophetess Anna; the Samaritan woman; the Syrophoenician woman; the woman with a hemorrhage; Mary Magdalene, the forgiven sinner; Joanna, Susana and those who didn't abandon Jesus during his Passion; and "many others" (*Lk 8:3*), besides all the Christian women of those first years who are mentioned in the New

Testament.[1] Throughout her history, the Church has always been adorned by holy women, among whom are four Doctors of the Church. In this long list Guadalupe's name is now included, because she lived the virtues in a heroic and discreet way, moved by the Holy Spirit, following the spirit of Opus Dei. The sanctity of these women, in the words of Pope Francis, "is the most attractive face of the Church,"[2] its most authentic image, since it reflects the life of Christ within each person.

Many of these women could recall the moment when God wanted to enter their lives in a new way, with special intensity, perhaps because they were prepared to undertake a divine adventure. The Decree on Guadalupe's virtues, after briefly reviewing her years of infancy and youth, describes her first encounter with Saint Josemaria, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of

January in 1944. It was a winter afternoon on a Tuesday. A friend she had met on the streetcar after Mass had recommended that she get to know this priest. Guadalupe recalls her first reaction, after a short exchange of words with the founder of Opus Dei: “I had the clear sensation that God was speaking to me through that priest ... I felt a great faith, a strong reflection of his own faith, and I decided to place myself in his hands for my whole life.”[3]

During the following days, the Decree goes on, Guadalupe “understood clearly that God was calling her to serve the Church through work done for love and through apostolate in the circumstances of ordinary life.”[4]

From that day on she began going to the first women’s center of Opus Dei, located on Jorge de Manrique Street, in Madrid, where little by little she incorporated into her life simple

customs of piety. On 19 March 1944, after making a retreat and less than two months after first meeting the founder of Opus Dei, Guadalupe asked for admission to the Work. “God, in his great goodness, wants me to work in it with all my strength,”<sup>[5]</sup> she wrote in a letter to Saint Josemaria. That day Guadalupe, like that woman in Bethany, chose to “break the flask” that contained her most valuable possession: her own life. On that day – and on all the following ones – Guadalupe wanted to anoint Jesus with the perfume of her freedom.

## **What I have within**

The Decree on her virtues highlights many facets of her rich personality: “her contagious cheerfulness, her fortitude in the face of adversity, her Christian optimism in difficult circumstances, and her self-giving to others.” It recalls her generosity with

those around her, especially when it meant giving up her time; her friendliness, obedience, temperance and tenacity. The same document also highlights her strong faith, shown in “her joyous acceptance of God’s will,” her hope and her charity.

This list might make us think that Guadalupe was an uncommon person. Someone with all these virtues probably stands in contrast to the impression we have of our own life, in which we often don’t even know where to begin to struggle. But we should never forget that sanctity, above all, is a work that God carries out in us. Moreover, it is good to realize that Guadalupe did not achieve it right from the start. Our Lord counts on our background, our jobs, our relationships with those around us, in order to mold in each person, little by little, the sanctity that reflects Christ’s life. Saint Josemaria, with his experience as a

priest, used to say that “souls, like good wine, improve with time.”[6]

In this regard, the letters sent by Guadalupe to the founder of Opus Dei over the years, in which she opens up her soul in a refined way, are a witness to the defects that day by day she herself discovered in her character.[7] Although these weaknesses often reappeared on a daily basis, she never resigned herself to them. Her love for God enabled her to keep struggling to overcome them. The strength that our Lord offers through the sacraments and through a life of piety can be seen clearly behind that description of Guadalupe’s virtues in the Decree above. A few days before boarding the plane that would take her to Mexico to plant the first seeds of Opus Dei’s apostolate there, she said: “in prayer and at Mass I’m making a great effort ... Each day I see more clearly that everything I do



comes from what I have within, and this give me a lot of peace.”[8]

## **Can this really be the path to Heaven?**

Blessed Guadalupe, we are told in the document from the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, dedicated herself to a great variety of activities. All these tasks and environments provided an opportunity to grow in sanctity: a university residence, a medical dispensary, a manual workshop, going from one village to another, in the offices guiding the apostolate of Opus Dei, in classes of chemistry or domestic sciences, in a hospital room...[9]

In March 1950, the first three women of Opus Dei set out for Mexico. During the next few years the apostolic work would expand to various cities, through a number of educational and social initiatives. For example, they took charge of

rehabilitating an abandoned hacienda called Montefalco, where activities for Christian formation were to be organized and social projects for the advancement of the local people set in motion.[10] In April 1955, Guadalupe spent some days there for a spiritual retreat. A few days later she wrote to Saint Josemaria in Rome: “If I told you that I experienced spiritual consolations, I wouldn’t be telling the truth; but I can assure you that, without ups or downs, I find God almost constantly in everything, all too naturally! I think I am very serene. The certainty of having God with me on my path makes me eager to do everything, and I find it easy to do things I didn’t like doing before. Father, I have just one worry: can this way I’m following really be the path to Heaven? I find it too comfortable, because I almost never have any personal problems.”[11]

Despite Guadalupe's optimistic words, she was facing some challenging problems in Mexico. Montefalco had begun operations with only two large rooms with folding beds and two bathrooms for almost forty people, besides having to conserve every drop of water with great care. At times there wasn't enough water to wash "even a handkerchief."<sup>[12]</sup> Moreover, Guadalupe was responsible for training the women who were to begin the apostolic work of Opus Dei in several Mexican cities and also in a number of countries where they were thinking of starting. And money was always scarce. Guadalupe had even written to some women of the Work in the United States, asking if they could send a few items of clothing, since they had used all their funds to buy a ticket for a Mexican woman going Rome.

But the spirit of Opus Dei had taught Guadalupe to find in all these challenges and difficulties an opportunity to identify herself with Christ's Cross. Some years later, on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1971, Saint Josemaria said in a family get-together: "I have shown you a way, a path to get to Heaven. I have given you a means to reach the goal in a contemplative way. Our Lord gives us this contemplative spirit, which normally you will scarcely notice."[13]

## **Wherever you go I will go**

The Prelate, in his January 9, 2018 letter, reminded us of the story of Ruth, one of the great women in the history of salvation, "whose freedom and self-giving are rooted in a deep sense of belonging to her family."[14] Ruth, a Moabite woman, became the wife of a young Jew who had come to a foreign land in search of a better future. In her new family, Ruth found

the meaning for her life: she found the worship of the true God, and became part of his people. In a short time, however, the three men in the family died, including her husband. When Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, decided to return to her native Bethlehem, she encouraged Ruth to stay and remake her life among her own people and gods. But despite the uncertain future, Ruth replies:

*Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God (Ruth 1:16).*

Countless generations have praised Ruth's faithfulness (as well as the generosity of the woman who poured perfume over Jesus). Many artists have been inspired to depict these scenes in their paintings. Guadalupe too discovered in her call to sanctity in Opus Dei her new family: "your

people shall be my people.” In her letters she clearly manifests her willingness to do whatever was necessary for her family and to always seek happiness for those near her. In December 1950 she wrote: “Today I have written for Christmas to all our people in Spain, Rome, Chicago and Ireland.”<sup>[15]</sup> On another occasion, she sent some advice to the woman directing a center of Opus Dei: “We need to love one another, even if at times it is a bit difficult, do you agree? Take good care of our people, of all of them.”<sup>[16]</sup> Her heart, even when suffering grave physical problems, had no boundaries.

In June 1975 Guadalupe was admitted to the University of Navarra Hospital for a long series of medical check-ups. But she never lost her good humor, and in her letters she compares the tranquil daily routines in the hospital to a health resort.<sup>[17]</sup> In the end, it was decided

that she needed an operation, on July 1, a few days after the death of Saint Josemaría. After the operation, which seemed to be successful, she wrote to Rome to thank everyone for their prayers: “I’m doing well here. Everyone can take a bit of credit for this. The Father, first of all, and through his intercession, your constant petition has been heard, and here I am with a heart that beats rhythmically and with strength.”[18]

These were probably the last words written by Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri. When Blessed Alvaro del Portillo read them, he wrote alongside: “Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri is with the Father in Heaven.” And now her heart has more rhythm and strength than ever.

*Andrés Cárdenas M.*

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[1] Benedict XVI, Audience, 14 February 2007.

[2] Francis, Apost. Exhort. *Gaudete et exsultate*, 19 March 2018, no. 9.

[3] Autograph manuscript, July 1975. Cited in Mercedes Eguibar, *Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri*, Ediciones Palabra, Madrid, 2001, p. 45.

[4] Decree on the Heroic Virtues of Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri, 4 May 2017.

[5] Letter to Saint Josemaría, March 19, 1944.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 78.

[7] Cf. *Letters to a Saint*, Opus Dei Information Office, 2018.

[8] Letter to Saint Josemaría, 28 February 1950.



[9] Cf. Decree on the Heroic Virtues of Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri, 4 May 2017.

[10] Cf. “Montefalco, 1950: una iniciativa pionera para la promoción de la mujer en el ámbito rural mexicano,” in *Studia et documenta*, no. 2, Rome, 2008, p. 214.

[11] Letter to Saint Josemaría, 24 April 1955.

[12] Cf. Mercedes Montero, *En Vanguardia*, Rialp, Madrid, 2019, pp. 183-184.

[13] *In Dialogue with the Lord*, Scepter 2018, pp. 124-125.

[14] Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, Letter, 9 January 2018, no. 9.

[15] Letter to Saint Josemaría, 18 December 1950.

[16] Letter to Cristina Ponce, February 1954.

[17] Cf. Letter to Mercedes Peláez, 22 June 1975.

[18] Letter to Carmen Ramos, 13 July 1975.

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