

# Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri: Chemist

Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri was one of the first Spanish women to earn a doctorate in chemistry. She played a major role in starting Opus Dei in Mexico and was known for her smile and good humor. She was declared Blessed by Pope Francis in 2019.

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Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri was a pioneer in many ways. She was one of the few Spanish women of her

generation who earned a doctorate in science. She was among the very early members of the women's branch of the Work, directed its first residence for university students, and played a leading role in starting Opus Dei in Mexico.

## Early Life

In 1927, when Guadalupe was eleven years old, her father, a professional Spanish artillery officer, was assigned to a base in North Africa where there were no secondary schools for girls. At the time, most Spaniards would not have been concerned about a girl's education. Guadalupe's parents, however, were determined to give her the best education they could, so they enrolled her in an all-boys school. She won the respect of her fellow students not only for her grades but also for her athletic prowess and her daring. She liked to recall that on one

occasion, she drank a bottle of ink on a dare. (Years later, shortly after arriving in Mexico, she similarly won the respect of a group of Mexican college students by winning a chili-eating contest.)

Guadalupe began studying chemistry at the University of Madrid in 1932, the year after her family returned to Spain. Most people at the time thought women did not need higher education. In Guadalupe's freshman year, only six percent of Spanish university students were women and hardly any of them studied science. The few women who graduated and began working professionally were expected to retire when they got married. Guadalupe did well in her studies and enjoyed an active social life. On at least one occasion, a friend who was a pilot took her flying in her biplane. During her college years, she had a serious boyfriend, although she sometimes complained

to her friends about his perfectionism.

At the outbreak of the civil war in Spain in 1936, Guadalupe's father was charged with treason and condemned to death by the Republican government. Through his connections to high-level Republican officials, her brother, Eduardo, managed to win a conditional last-minute pardon. Their father, however, refused to accept the conditions. Guadalupe, together with her mother and brother Eduardo, spent their father's final night with him in his prison cell. Eduardo recalls that she "did not show signs of emotion, and her serenity gave strength to my mother and, certainly, to me."

All Spanish universities remained closed during the three years of the civil war, but in June 1940, Guadalupe finally received her

degree in chemistry. She would have liked to go on directly to a PhD but needed to start work immediately to support herself and her widowed mother. She began teaching chemistry at the French International School and the Irish School in Madrid. Guadalupe planned to get married and have a family but does not seem to have been in a hurry. Although she went to Mass on Sundays and occasionally said the Rosary, religion did not play an especially important role in her life. One day at Mass, however, she experienced a strong conviction that God was asking something more of her, though she didn't know what.

Guadalupe asked a friend for the name of a priest who could advise her and was referred to the founder of Opus Dei. She met St. Josemaría for the first time on January 25, 1944. Years later she recalled that at their first meeting, she had “the clear

sensation that God was speaking to me through that priest. I felt a great faith that was a reflection of his. Interiorly, I put myself in his hands for the rest of my life.” On March 19, 1944, after making a retreat, Guadalupe asked to join Opus Dei. Two months later, she moved into the Work’s only women’s center located on the outskirts of Madrid.

## **First Years in Opus Dei**

When Guadalupe joined Opus Dei, the men’s branch was growing rapidly and had somewhere between three hundred and five hundred members, but the women’s branch still had only a handful of members. St. Josemaría was convinced that, in the future, the women of Opus Dei would carry out a wide range of professional activities, including research and university teaching. In addition, he envisioned that they would take care of the cooking,

housekeeping, and laundry services with the goal of making the Work's centers true Christian homes with the warmth and atmosphere of a Christian family. He called the women who carried out these tasks and the work they did the Administration. In the early years, he asked the few women of Opus Dei to concentrate on staffing the Administration, curtailing for the moment other apostolic and professional activities.

Guadalupe had little talent for homemaking and even less experience. Nonetheless, in September 1945, she moved to Bilbao in northern Spain with three other women to work in the Administration of a new residence for male university students. On this and many later occasions, Guadalupe showed her willingness to contribute to the development of Opus Dei by taking on cheerfully, and even

enthusiastically, essential tasks for which she was not particularly well equipped, putting aside for the moment the professional work she had spent years preparing for.

Days after arriving in Bilbao, she wrote to Escrivá: “I’m very happy here. Some days I notice God’s presence very much.” Referring to the fact that the Blessed Sacrament would soon be reserved in the tabernacle of the oratory, she said that she was “preparing him a new home. Very soon he will come to live with me.” A year later, after telling Escrivá about the difficulties she encountered in living the plan of life and how sorry she was about failing many times to fulfill all the norms, she said, “I would like the Lord to be content [with me] and seeing how much he helps me despite everything, I even think at times that he is and that he forgives me.”

In March 1946, two years after joining Opus Dei, Guadalupe became the director of the Work in Bilbao. She wrote to Escrivá:

I am delighted to say that here I am, now acting as the head and tomorrow in the last spot, but always content because I am serving the Lord. Every day I have more confidence in his help and less in my own strength. From the moment in which Nisa [who till then had been the director] told me at she was leaving [for another post in Madrid], I asked him very truly not to separate himself from me for even a moment. With him, I want to always carry the house on my shoulders and move my sisters to come closer to him.

After two years in Bilbao, during which the apostolate of Opus Dei grew substantially, Guadalupe returned to Madrid to join the governing body of the women's

branch of Opus Dei, establish a residence for university women called Zurbarán, and begin her PhD studies in chemistry.

Establishing Zurbarán was not easy. Few of the handful of women members of the Work had themselves studied at the university. The pool of female university students from which residents could be recruited was small and, even in that small pool, there were many characters who would not find it easy to live with other women in a residence that aspired to promote academic excellence and serious Christian life. It would be several years before Zurbarán would be full. This brought with it serious financial problems and meant that the fledgling residence could not afford to be very selective. It would have been easier to start with a girls' school, a teachers' college, or some other more traditional women's

institution, but Escrivá wanted the women of Opus Dei to focus from the beginning on the university.

Even more difficult than filling the beds was creating in the residence a welcoming, homelike environment. Guadalupe and the other members of the Work struggled to foster a climate of peace and harmony, but in the beginning, heated arguments broke out frequently, especially over politics. Little by little, however, the environment in Zurbarán improved and more and more students who lived there or in other residences and boarding houses began attending classes of Christian formation and other activities. Many of them turned frequently to Guadalupe for advice about their studies and their spiritual life. Many nights she was up to all hours talking with students.

## **Starting Opus Dei in Mexico**

In 1949, Escrivá asked Guadalupe if she would be willing to head a small group that would start Opus Dei's apostolic activities with women in Mexico. In a letter a few days later, she said, "I am delighted to go, although I don't really think much about it. Just in the mental prayer, I dedicate a little time to praying about it, and from time to time I say a Rosary to Our Lady of Guadalupe praying for everything that I still don't even know about."

Guadalupe flew to Mexico together with Maolia Ortiz and María Ester Cianas on March 3, 1950. Fr. Pedro Casciaro, the head of Opus Dei in Mexico, had met many women, who helped the new arrivals find their way in Mexico. At the end of the month, he preached a retreat for fifty young women, mostly college students. On April 1, 1950, the first women's center, a university residence called Copenhaguen,

opened its doors. In addition to being the director of the residence and of Opus Dei's activities in Mexico, Guadalupe enrolled in doctoral courses in chemistry, but, not surprisingly, she did not make much academic progress during the years she lived in Mexico.

At first, there were few residents, but from the beginning the house was full of students who came to study or attend meditations, days of recollection, or circles. At the end of May, the first resident joined Opus Dei as a numerary. Guadalupe earned the affection and respect of the students with her warm character, cheerfulness, and good humor, which often found expression in a deep, hearty laugh. One friend said, "Despite the time that has gone by, whenever I think about her, I hear her laugh. Guadalupe wore a permanent smile. A smile that was welcoming, good-

natured, and simple.” Another friend says:

She had a permanent smile. Guadalupe laughed a great deal and was always smiling. I think that this was a result of her complete forgetfulness of self. I never saw her looking serious or worried. She was completely detached from her health, and I didn’t see any other issues that affected her enough to keep her from smiling.

Another facet of her personality that facilitated Guadalupe’s work as director of the residence and of Opus Dei’s other activities in Mexico was, according to one of her collaborators, “always seeing the positive aspects of each person. At times she was somewhat lacking in objectivity because her positive sense made her exaggerate the good found in others.”

Closely connected with her optimism was understanding. According to a

person who worked with her, “In the difficult equilibrium between being understanding and being demanding, she always inclined toward the first. She understood that in some cases it is necessary to give in for the good of souls. Some people said that she was too understanding, but no one said that she was too demanding in her approach.”

Perhaps for this reason, according to another person who knew her well, “When she had to correct something, she did so with fortitude, but with such refinement and affection that it didn’t feel like a scolding but rather something you appreciated.”

## **Working with All Types of People**

Guadalupe related easily to the residents and their friends, who belonged to the highest social classes of Mexico City, but she was equally at ease with uneducated indigenous girls from the surrounding farming

communities, known in Mexico as *ranchos*. She hired a number of those girls to come to work in the Administration of the student residence while receiving an elementary education. Their fathers, who often did not even speak Spanish, viewed the big city with deep suspicion but trusted Guadalupe enough to allow their daughters to leave the village to work and study in the capital.

Learning to read and write as well as to cook and sew, perfecting their Spanish, and getting to know Mexico City opened horizons these girls could not have dreamed of in their villages.

To visit the *ranchos*, Guadalupe had to travel through dangerous areas, often alone on horseback. Friends suggested that she carry a pistol, but she preferred a knife because she was afraid she might unnecessarily shoot someone at a distance. If it

came to using the knife, she explained, she would know that it was clearly necessary. On one of her trips, she got off the bus in a little town and was walking on a lonely road when she realized that a man was following her. She changed direction several times, but he kept close behind. She wheeled around, slapped him, and asked what he thought he was doing. The man fled and Guadalupe continued on her way. The incident did not deter her from making similar trips in the future.

Guadalupe also got to know some Spanish exiles who had fled Spain at the end of the civil war. Among them was Ernestina de Champourcin, a well-known poet whose husband had been the political secretary of the president of the Spanish Republic when Guadalupe's father was executed by the Republic. The two became good friends, and eventually,

Ernestina became one of the first married members of Opus Dei in Mexico.

## **Montefalco Conference Center**

During the first years of its activities in Mexico, Opus Dei held retreats in borrowed houses, usually out in the country. While giving a talk during one of those activities in 1952, Guadalupe was stung by a scorpion. Despite the acute pain, Guadalupe brushed the arachnid aside and continued giving the talk as if nothing had happened. Soon thereafter she developed a life-threatening fever, perhaps due to malaria. Her recovery was slow and difficult.

Both Guadalupe and Fr. Casciaro wanted Opus Dei to have a place of its own that could be used for retreats and other formational activities and as a base for offering education and formation to the

peasants living in the environs. A wealthy, socially active family offered Opus Dei a former sugar plantation south of Mexico City called Santa Clara de Montefalco. Until the early twentieth century, it had had vast fields of sugar cane as well as many large buildings in an area enclosed by a high wall. During the revolution that began in 1910, most of the land was confiscated and all the buildings burned down except for a church that formed part of the compound. When Guadalupe visited it for the first time in 1951, the plantation was completely abandoned and overgrown with tropical vegetation. The church was the only building with a roof, and it had no glass in the windows and was infested with rats and bats. Although everything was in ruins and there was neither electricity nor running water, Guadalupe was enthused with the hacienda's possibilities. In a letter after a visit in 1952 when none of the

buildings was even remotely habitable, she exclaimed, “How beautiful it is!”

It took several years to finalize the purchase of the property by a non-profit organization that made it available for retreats and other activities. In 1954, the first retreat was held at Montefalco. The participants had to carry in food and water, coal for cooking, sheets, towels, and everything else they needed. At night, before going to bed on cots, they killed scorpions. For the first few years, the only permanent occupants were a caretaker and his family, but in 1956 a group of women of Opus Dei moved in. Two years later, they opened a school for peasant girls from the surrounding towns. By that time, however, Guadalupe had left Mexico.

## **Directing Opus Dei in Mexico**

Guadalupe was a woman of vision and big plans. A Spanish member of the Work who moved to Mexico observed, “We tended to be taken up in solving immediate problems, but Guadalupe was way out ahead of us.” Under Guadalupe’s leadership, the women of Opus Dei had opened centers in Monterrey and Culiacán by the end of 1951. By the time she left Mexico in 1956, there were eleven centers in different parts of the country.

Just planning all these undertakings—solving the economic and staffing problems they presented, and overseeing their development—was an enormous challenge. But in addition, Guadalupe played a central role in planning the formation of the many women of all social classes who joined Opus Dei. In many cases, she was also personally involved in guiding them spiritually.

All of this was possible thanks to her intelligence, optimism, daring, executive ability, and willingness to delegate responsibility to young women who had only recently joined Opus Dei. But above all, it was due to her unwavering confidence in God and openness to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. She passed on to the director of one of the centers her own experience:

The things that happen to you all seem to me very human. Don't worry about them, but try to react and see things more from the perspective of God and the eternal truths. I assure you that the irritating little things that put us in a bad mood disappear when viewed against this background which is so real and so fundamental.

Guadalupe had no desire to occupy leadership positions. Her principal resolution from her retreat in 1954,

was “to let others govern. To annul myself little by little so that they take on more responsibility. I have given enough orders.” At the end of 1955, she told Escrivá, “Father, I’ve been the head for many years. Wouldn’t it be good to begin to be the feet?” She added, however, “But as you know, here or wherever you put me, I will be happy serving God in the Work.”

## **Living Close to God**

During her years in Mexico, Guadalupe continued to grow in interior life. During a retreat in 1955, she wrote to Escrivá:

It would not be true if I told you that I have sensible spiritual consolations, but I can assure you that there are no ups or downs. I find God almost constantly in everything, with too much naturalness. I think I take things too much for granted. My security that God is on my path, near me, makes me eager to do

everything. It makes easy the things that in the past I didn't like to do. Now without even thinking about it, I do them. Father, I do have one concern: does the path I'm on lead to heaven? I find it too comfortable since I almost never have personal problems.

She found, as she told Escrivá in a 1954 letter, that "I think so much about the others that I no longer think about myself." Nonetheless, she feared that although deeply concerned about others, she didn't have enough affection for them. She confessed to Escrivá in a May 1956 letter:

My struggle is mostly in putting more heart into things, because perhaps my charity is not very deep. A few times my sisters have said so to me. They say that they notice that I am concerned about them but that there comes a moment in which they find a

sort of barrier in me, that they don't get all the way into me. Father, I'm not very clear what exactly this means, but I am going to ask God to love him more, and in that way surely, I will also love others better.

Toward the end of her stay in Mexico, she wrote to Escrivá:

I think this year we have to really move forward spiritually, and I the first. Until now I have prayed for and tried to achieve the virtues we need in the Work (piety, work, joy, apostolate, spirit of sacrifice, etc.). This is what I have also prayed for and tried to achieve for the other members of the Work. But now I see the need to go deeper. By now, there should be contemplative souls in the region, who desire and ask for more spiritually refined things, and who know how to appreciate them. Help me to win this from God. If I'm not made for this sort of thing, may I at

least not be an obstacle to others achieving it. May I have God's grace to orient them and encourage them to travel these paths. May I also have the desire to try them and the humility and patience to understand that God may not want this for me, although I desire it with all my soul.

She recorded in her notebook her desire "to go deep into silence to the point where God alone is. Where not even the angels can enter without our permission. And there, to adore God, to praise him, and to say loving things to him."

## **In Rome**

In October 1956, Guadalupe attended the General Congress of Opus Dei in Rome. The members of the Congress elected her a member of the international governing body of the women's branch, the central advisory. Her new position involved supervising Opus Dei's apostolate

with married women throughout the world. She took up residence in Villa Tevere, the Work's Rome headquarters.

The women's branch was growing rapidly and planning to begin activities in France, Uruguay, and Brazil in 1957. One hundred women were living in Villa Tevere, between the members of the central advisory, the people who worked in the Administration, and the students at the Roman College of Holy Mary, Opus Dei's international center of formation for women. The buildings were very crowded, but that did not seem to bother Guadalupe. Although she undoubtedly missed Mexico and the people she had left behind there, she was very happy in Rome, particularly because she was frequently able to see and talk with Escrivá.

She was still settling into her new job when she suffered a severe heart attack on March 6, 1957. She cheerfully accepted God's will and showed no sign of fear. In her notebook, she wrote: "If death comes now, I will go to purgatory for a while—not for anything concrete—and then I will help the Work from above as much as I can."

Gradually she recovered and began to return to normal life, although she still couldn't climb stairs and needed to rest more than usual. Her brother Eduardo, a distinguished professor of medicine at the University of Navarre, suggested that she go to Madrid for surgery. In early July she had two heart valves replaced. At the time, the operation was novel and dangerous, but it went well. A week later she wrote to Escrivá:

It has been a week of great physical pain but of much moral consolation.

I have felt as never before, affection for you, for my sisters, and for all the members of the Work. Once again let me thank you. I do not deserve so much. ... I will try to behave well and to be courageous.

The presence of God does marvels. How you notice it! I want to return promptly and to serve.

After four months in Madrid, Guadalupe returned to Rome in October 1957. On December 27, she began to suffer from pneumonia and atrial fibrillation. Her heart rate became so elevated and her arrhythmia so severe, that the doctor could not even determine her pulse rate. Guadalupe accepted the situation calmly, saying to one of the women who were with her, “Don’t worry! Nothing is going to happen, and furthermore, I have everything in order.” Little by little, she once again recovered.

## Back in Madrid

In May 1958, Guadalupe returned to Spain. Her doctors found her situation puzzling, but eventually concluded that she was well enough to live a normal life if she avoided excessive exercise and slept more than usual. By July, she was able to begin helping out with formational activities for married members in a conference center near Madrid, but not well enough to resume her duties as a member of the central advisory. At the end of the month, she resigned her position and began a new stage of her life. At forty-two years of age and with serious heart problems, she returned to her youthful dream of completing a doctorate in chemistry and carrying out research.

In the fall of 1958, after a summer spent filling in for people who were out of Madrid attending courses of formation, Guadalupe began

working regularly at Montelar, a center where some two hundred girls, many from well-to-do families, including the daughter of the US ambassador, learned home economics, and where many of their mothers attended days of recollection. Guadalupe found herself giving classes on practical Christian life to a group of young girls as well as helping to organize the days of recollection for their mothers. At first, she was concerned that her age would prove a problem in dealing with students who could be her daughters, but she soon found that “they trust me and our friendship is increasing, which makes it possible for me to help them come closer to God and to the Work.”

Many of the students who came to Montelar offered to teach catechism to small children in some of the poorest areas of Madrid, and the medical students organized a walk-in

clinic in Valdebebas, a shanty town whose inhabitants lacked even the most elementary medical services.

In the fall of 1959, Guadalupe began to live in the Montelar center. It must have been a strain for a woman over forty years of age who had serious heart problems to live in a center that was often full to overflowing with four to five hundred high school girls whom Guadalupe described to Escrivá as “being very modern looking and having very few serious things in their heads.” Guadalupe focused on “discovering behind their appearance the possibilities of each one.” She rejoiced that many of them were involved in social projects and that they were gradually coming to know the spirit of Opus Dei. With evident relish, she told Escrivá that “a young woman from a very well-known family who at the beginning of the school year was a frivolous little girl came with a marvelous

bouquet and blushed as she asked if she could put it next to the tabernacle.” Guadalupe was delighted that “almost all the girls greet our Lord in the oratory when they come into the house and make a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament when they leave.”

Guadalupe frequently looked back with some nostalgia on the time she had spent in Rome close to St. Josemaría and the women who made up the central governing body of Opus Dei. In a letter to Escrivá shortly before the Feast of St. Joseph, she wrote that on St. Joseph’s day she would pray with all my strength to the Lord for you and for all the Work, asking a year full of sanctity, of perseverance, and effectiveness. As I do on all special days, I will try to spend that day in Rome near you and my sisters, recalling what happened in Villa Tevere during the two years that I had the good fortune to spend

there. Everything that has happened in my life is wonderful, but having been in Rome is one of the things that I am most grateful for.

By the fall of 1960, Guadalupe was well enough to begin teaching chemistry and physics in the most prestigious public boys' high school in Madrid, Ramiro de Maeztu.

Despite the difficulties a woman could expect to face teaching science to teenage boys, Guadalupe proved a popular teacher. She worked at Ramiro for three years, and after the first year also taught chemistry in the Women's Industrial School.

In 1962, Guadalupe became the director of the center where the women who directed Opus Dei's activities in Spain lived. She was not a member of the governing body but was responsible for the day-to-day life of the center. She told Escrivá: "I try to help my sisters who belong to

the Regional Advisory as much as possible. I have a great deal of affection for all of them. We have a good time in family life. In my mental prayer, I ask the Lord what he wants me to say to each one of them.”

In 1963, Guadalupe began to combine her activities in Montelar and as the director of the center of the regional advisory with writing her dissertation in chemistry. She worked with great concentration but kept the door of her room open so anyone who wanted to speak to her could do so easily. She could not find a single lab with all the equipment she needed and had to work in several in Madrid, as well as in Valencia, Barcelona, and Bilbao. Her dissertation advisor was a woman who had obtained her own master's in 1932 at the age of nineteen and had gone on to win her PhD and do postgraduate work in Copenhagen.

Guadalupe's dissertation was in applied chemistry, focusing on the use of rice hulls to make heat-resistant bricks for boilers and furnaces. She obtained her doctorate in July 1965.

Given her age and the length of the process for becoming a university professor in Spain, Guadalupe had no realistic possibility of getting a position at the university, so she focused on winning a permanent position in the Women's Industrial School where she had had a temporary appointment for four years. In 1968, she received a permanent position at the school, and she would remain there for the rest of her working life. At one point, her colleagues elected her director of the school, which at the time had about one thousand students, but Guadalupe's health was too fragile to permit her to accept the post.

Since the mid-1960s, some women of Opus Dei, encouraged by the Founder, had been working on professionalizing the Administration. From very early in the history of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría had insisted that the work of the Administration was not only vitally important for Opus Dei, (the “apostolate of the apostolates” he often called it) but a professional task that required serious education and training. Nonetheless, because of the rapid growth of Opus Dei’s apostolic activities, most of the actual training had been improvised on the job.

By 1968, when Guadalupe became involved, the women’s branch was rolling out a four-year degree program for women who would oversee Administrations. It was like home economics in the United States and many other countries, but with a focus on the special needs of Opus Dei centers. Guadalupe taught

chemistry with an emphasis on fabrics and their care. To carryout experiments, she made arrangements to use the laboratories of several detergent manufacturers.

## **Failing Health**

As the years went by, Guadalupe found it increasingly difficult to keep up the pace, but she did not slow down. As she wrote to Escrivá: “At times, I think I no longer have the strength that these activities and comings and goings require, but I continue doing them and it seems that the Lord wants me to because they all come out well. I can hardly find a way to say no.” In 1973, she was awarded the medal of the International Committee on Rayon and Synthetic Fibers. The same year she privately published a book on laundry technology.

Gradually, Guadalupe’s heart problems became more severe. A

simple cold or flu could put her into fibrillation which required hospitalization. She could hardly talk after climbing one flight of stairs. For a while, she seemed to respond to medication, and most people were not aware of how sick she was. She did not complain and tried not to let her limitations show. She managed to continue to teach while serving as director of an Opus Dei center.

By the summer of 1975, however, her doctors began to think that the only solution was to replace damaged valves. She traveled to the hospital of the University of Navarre in Pamplona for extensive tests. Shortly before leaving Madrid, she wrote: "I am going to Pamplona to put myself in the hands of those who know, because it's the right thing to do. But I don't believe I will return. I'm not afraid of pain or death. If I'm afraid of anything, it is of not being yet sufficiently mature." On the way to

Pamplona, she said to the person who accompanied her: “I am in God’s hands. If he wants to cure me, I will be very happy to continue living to serve the Work. Furthermore, after successful surgery, I would be healthy and therefore could do things better than during these past years. But it would give me much joy to see God, to be with him.”

From the hospital where she was undergoing tests, she wrote to Escrivá saying that she was praying for him and his intentions and asking him to pray for her “to behave well in whatever God may want of me now.” On June 27, her brother Eduardo told her about Escrivá’s death the previous day. He said, “One of two things will happen. You may rejoin him soon and see him at the side of God and of Our Lady. Or the Father may ask God to have you stay here. Both paths are good.” Guadalupe immediately began to

pray for Escrivá and for Álvaro del Portillo who was expected to succeed him. Her brother says, “She was aware of all the dangers of the surgery but accepted it without the slightest doubt, thinking that [if it was successful] she would be more useful to the Work, or if she did not survive the surgery and God wanted to take her life, that would be even better.”

Finally, on July 1, 1975, she underwent open heart surgery. On her way into the operating room, she said with a smile, “Don’t worry. I don’t know if the Father will say to me, ‘Guadalupe, come on up here’ or ‘Stay down there,’ Either would be good.”

In the first few days following the surgery, she seemed to be recovering well. She wrote to the acting head of Opus Dei, Álvaro del Portillo, “The prayer of my body has been offered,

loved, accepted, and lived for the Father and for you. It was, perhaps, the only thing that this daughter and sister could do.”

On July 12, in response to Del Portillo’s request for much prayer and sacrifice for Escrivá’s soul, Guadalupe wrote:

Since I found out on June 27 about the death of the Father, I offered the entire heart operation carried out on July 1 and my collaboration in it. I don’t think I retreated at any moment. Quite the contrary, even in the long periods in which I was conscious in the operating room since part of the procedure was carried out under local anesthetic. This offering was made almost constantly as I maintained the presence of Christ, the Virgin, and the Father. I was able to do this naturally before and during the operation and in the postoperative

period, which included three days of rehabilitation, exercises, massages, etc. I have offered my Communion and since the seventh [of July], mass, the daily norms, the three parts of the rosary, and many aspirations, especially: "Jesus, Joseph, and Mary, I give you my heart and my soul." I have offered my cheerfulness and words of affection for everyone as well: doctors, nurses, and all kinds of other people. I don't think that I have asked for anything or complained at all.

During the more than a month she was in the hospital, she made a point of talking with the people who cleaned her room and offered them candy. When they finished cleaning, she always thanked them. A young nurse who was beginning to specialize in cardiology spent many hours caring for Guadalupe. She wrote:

Guadalupe was different from the other patients. ... She could hardly sleep because of her difficulty in breathing, nor could she make any effort. Nonetheless, I never heard her complain or comment at all about how much that situation must have cost her. I was amazed and did not know what to think. I distinguished clearly between a strong person, who puts up with illness, and Guadalupe, who accepted it in such an extraordinarily serene way.

Thanks to her experience with Guadalupe, the nurse returned to the Church and later joined Opus Dei.

In her notebook, Guadalupe wrote: "I accept death or life, whichever. I will be happy if I go to you soon, but I accept everything, including staying here to serve. Whatever you want. I am serene. I am not afraid. I feel contrition for the good I have failed

to do to my sisters. I'm a bit of a clown."

Eventually, Guadalupe was able to get up and even go outside to visit the nearby shrine of Our Lady of Fair Love. Suddenly, however, she suffered a major collapse on July 14. Two days later, on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, after kissing the crucifix and a picture of Our Lady, she stopped breathing.

Guadalupe was beatified in 2019.

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This sketch of Blessed Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri is from John Coverdale's book and podcast "Encounters: Finding God in All Walks of Life." *Encounters* presents profiles of people living Saint Josemaria's message of finding God in everyday life.

The profiles have been released as an audio podcast series, available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your podcasts. You can also purchase the entire book from Amazon or Scepter Publishers.

John Coverdale

From "Encounters: Finding God in All Walks of Life", published by Scepter Publishers

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