**Partner A: Our Lady of Guadalupe**  
**Patron saint of Mexico**

**Written by:**[**The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica**](http://www.britannica.com/bps/user-profile/4419/the-editors-of-encyclopaedia-britannica)

In [Roman Catholicism](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-Catholicism), the Virgin Mary made her appearance before [Juan Diego](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Juan-Diego) in a vision in 1531. The name also refers to the Marian apparition itself. Our Lady of Guadalupe holds a special place in the religious life of Mexico and is one of the most popular religious devotions. Her image has played an important role as a national symbol of Mexico.

According to tradition, Mary appeared to Juan Diego, who was an Aztec convert to [Christianity](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity), on December 9 and again on December 12, 1531. She requested that a shrine to her be built on the spot where she appeared, Tepeyac Hill (now in a suburb of Mexico City). The [bishop](http://www.britannica.com/topic/bishop-Christianity) demanded a sign before he would approve construction of a church, however. Mary appeared a second time to Juan Diego and ordered him to collect roses. In a second audience with the bishop, Juan Diego opened his cloak, letting dozens of roses fall to the floor and revealing the image of Mary imprinted on the inside of the cloak—the image that is now venerated in the [Basilica of Guadalupe](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Basilica-of-Guadalupe)….

…A shrine to the Virgin has existed on the site since at least 1556, when the archbishop of New [Spain](http://www.britannica.com/place/Spain) promoted devotion to the image of Mary at a chapel in Tepeyac. The image was described by an English prisoner in [Mexico City](http://www.britannica.com/place/Mexico-City) in 1568, and by the end of the 16th century Our Lady of Guadalupe formed part of a wide network of shrines to the Virgin throughout Mexico. The story of Mary’s appearance to Juan Diego was codified in the work of Miquel Sánchez in 1648, and an account in the indigenous language (Nahuatl) was published in 1649 and widely accepted as accurate. The devotion continued to grow, especially after Our Lady of Guadalupe was credited with ending a deadly epidemic that ravaged Mexico City in 1736–37. In 1737 she was proclaimed patroness of Mexico City, and in 1746 her patronage was accepted by all the territories of New Spain, which included part of present-day California as well as Mexico and regions as far south as Guatemala and El Salvador. In 1754 Pope [Benedict XIV](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Benedict-XIV-pope) approved her patronage and granted her a proper feast and [mass](http://www.britannica.com/topic/mass-Roman-Catholicism) for December 12. Pope [Pius X](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Pius-X) proclaimed her patroness of Latin America in 1910, and in 1935 [Pius XI](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Pius-XI) approved her patronage over the [Philippines](http://www.britannica.com/place/Philippines). Veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been particularly strong among women, especially in Mexico, and since at least the early 18th century the devotion was spread throughout the world by the Jesuits and other religious.

Our Lady of Guadalupe’s role in Mexican history is not limited to religious matters; she has played an important role in Mexican nationalism and identity. In 1810 [Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Miguel-Hidalgo-y-Costilla) promoted her as the patroness of the revolt he led against the Spanish. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared on the rebels’ banners, and the rebels’ battle cry was “Long Live Our Lady of Guadalupe.” During a religious revival in Mexico in the late 19th century, preachers declared that the foundation of Mexico could be dated to the time of the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe, because she freed the people from idolatry and reconciled the Spanish and indigenous peoples in a common devotion. [Emiliano Zapata](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Emiliano-Zapata)’s [peasant](http://www.britannica.com/topic/peasantry) rebels carried the banner of Our Lady when they entered Mexico City in 1914, and, during the civil war in Mexico in 1926–29, the banners of the rebels bore her image. Her continuing significance as a religious and national symbol is attested by the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who visit her shrine every year.