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New saints

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of the New World. The pope, laboring through a lengthy Mass in Mexico City, said he was proud to proclaim the first indigenous saint of the Americas, a "simple, humble Indian" who found faith by contemplating the face of Mary.

By accepting Christianity without giving up his Indian identity, the saint became a catalyst for Christian evangelization in the region, the pope said during a vibrant liturgy in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. When St. Juan Diego's picture was carried to the altar, the circular basilica was filled with incense from below and showered in confetti from above.

Mexican native Josefino Paz, adolescent outreach coordinator for the federally funded Brockport Migrant Education Project, is a parishioner at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Brockport. Paz grew up in Oaxaca, home of the two beatified martyrs, and said that the pope's canonization of Juan Diego meant a great deal to him as a Mixteco Indian.

"He represents me and anyone who is indigenous," said Paz, who watched the canonization ceremony on television in Brockport. Indigenous Mexicans have a long history of being abused and neglected, he said, and the fact that the church has canonized Juan Diego serves as a sign of indigenous people's full humanity. Juan Diego will now be on the top of his list of saints he will call upon for intercession, he said.

"When I need to pray for someone ... I believe that (Juan Diego) will understand my situation better," Paz said. "I'll talk to him in my dialect, instead of Spanish or English."

In his homily, Pope John Paul spoke about the Indians' precarious position in Mexico and other countries of the Americas, and said the church supports their legitimate social aspirations and efforts to protect their traditional ethnic values.

"In praising the Indian Juan Diego, I want to express to all of you the closeness of the church and the pope, embracing you with love and encouraging you to overcome with hope the difficult times you are going through," he said.

Professing his "deep respect and admiration" for Mexico's indigenous peoples, the pope carefully explained why the church sees in St. Juan Diego a model of the Gospel's interaction with local cultures.

He recalled the essential elements of the saint's story: his visions of Mary in 1531 and his unsuccessful efforts to convince local church authorities of the apparitions — until he unfurled a cloak full of out-of-season roses to the local bishop.

The peasant's cloak or "tilma," which hangs in a glass case in the basilica, bore an image of a dark-skinned Mary, an image now recognized around the world. The pope said the "mestizo" or mixed-blood



Reuters/CNS

Pope John Paul II blesses the relics of two Mexican martyrs during a beatification ceremony at Mexico City's Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe Aug. 1.

features of the miraculous likeness expressed Mary's spiritual motherhood for all Mexicans.

The canonization was not without controversy. Some church experts, including three Mexican priests and the retired abbot of the Guadalupe basilica, maintained there is no proof of Juan Diego's historical existence and warned that declaring him a saint would harm the church's credibility. But the Vatican established a special commission of historians, which concluded in 1998 that Juan Diego had, indeed, existed.

The pope did not refer to the dispute, but he said in his sermon that simple people have always considered Juan Diego a saint, proof of the biblical teaching that God is "glorified by the humble." He quoted the words of Jesus in the Gospel, saying that God has hidden some truths from "the wise and the learned" and revealed them to the childlike.

Paz said devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe was a constant feature of life growing up in Oaxaca. He noted that every home had a framed image of her, and most of his neighbors had home altars filled with candles and pictures of her and other saints.

"She was important to the whole community, and not just to individual families," he said.

Central American saint

At a Mass attended by an estimated 500,000 Guatemalans, Pope John Paul II proclaimed the first Central American saint and said his work with the poor and the sick make him an "outstanding example" of Christian mercy.

A wave of applause spread through an

overflow crowd at a Guatemala City race-track July 30 as the pope pronounced the sainthood decree for St. Pedro de San Jose Betancur, a 17th-century missionary who built hospitals, schools and shelters in the former Guatemalan capital now called Antigua. The new saint represents "an urgent appeal to practice mercy in modern society, especially when so many are hoping for a helping hand," the pope said from an altar adorned with thousands of flowers.

The saint — known simply as "Hermano Pedro" to Guatemalans — was born in the Canary Islands and arrived in Central America as a young man, convinced that his calling was to spread the Gospel in the New World.

Board

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Pamela D. Hayes, Johns Hopkins University psychiatry professor Dr. Paul R. McHugh and Chicago archdiocesan clinical-pastoral coordinator of victim outreach Michael J. Bland, himself a former victim of sexual abuse by a priest.

SNAP leaders said they regard several dioceses as violating the charter, based on published news accounts of priests accused but not immediately removed, efforts by church lawyers in Kentucky to seal civil suits under a state law calling for certain cases to be sealed, and the reinstatement of a priest in Virginia before the diocesan review board made a recommendation.

Msgr. Francis J. Maniscalco, USCCB secretary for communications, cautioned

A man of deep prayer, he came to Guatemala in 1651 and began working among the most disadvantaged of the capital — the poor, the imprisoned, the slaves and the sick. A lay member of the Franciscans, he was known as the "St. Francis of the Americas" by the time he died of pneumonia at age 41.

The pope said Hermano Pedro found his inspiration in prayer. In Christ, he found the strength to "practice mercy heroically with the lowliest and the most deprived," the pope said.

He said the saint personifies "a heritage that must not be lost" and a call to mercy in a world still full of suffering people.

"Let us think of the children and young people who are homeless or deprived of an education; of abandoned women with their many needs; of the hordes of social outcasts who live in the cities; of the victims of organized crime, of prostitution or of drugs; of the sick who are neglected and the elderly who live in loneliness," he said.

The pope took the occasion to express the church's closeness to Guatemala's indigenous peoples, who suffered most in Guatemala's 36-year civil war and who remain the most neglected among the country's population.

"The pope does not forget you and, admiring the values of your cultures, encourages you to overcome with hope the sometimes difficult situations you experience," he said. He said they have the right to justice, personal development and peace.

The 24-hour stop was the pope's third and briefest visit to the Central American country, but it held deep significance to the many Guatemalans who flocked to see the pontiff and celebrate their new saint.

"The pope is old but he's still going around to countries, even for just one Mass," said 19-year-old Javier Pira.

Contains reporting by Rob Cullivan in Rochester.

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