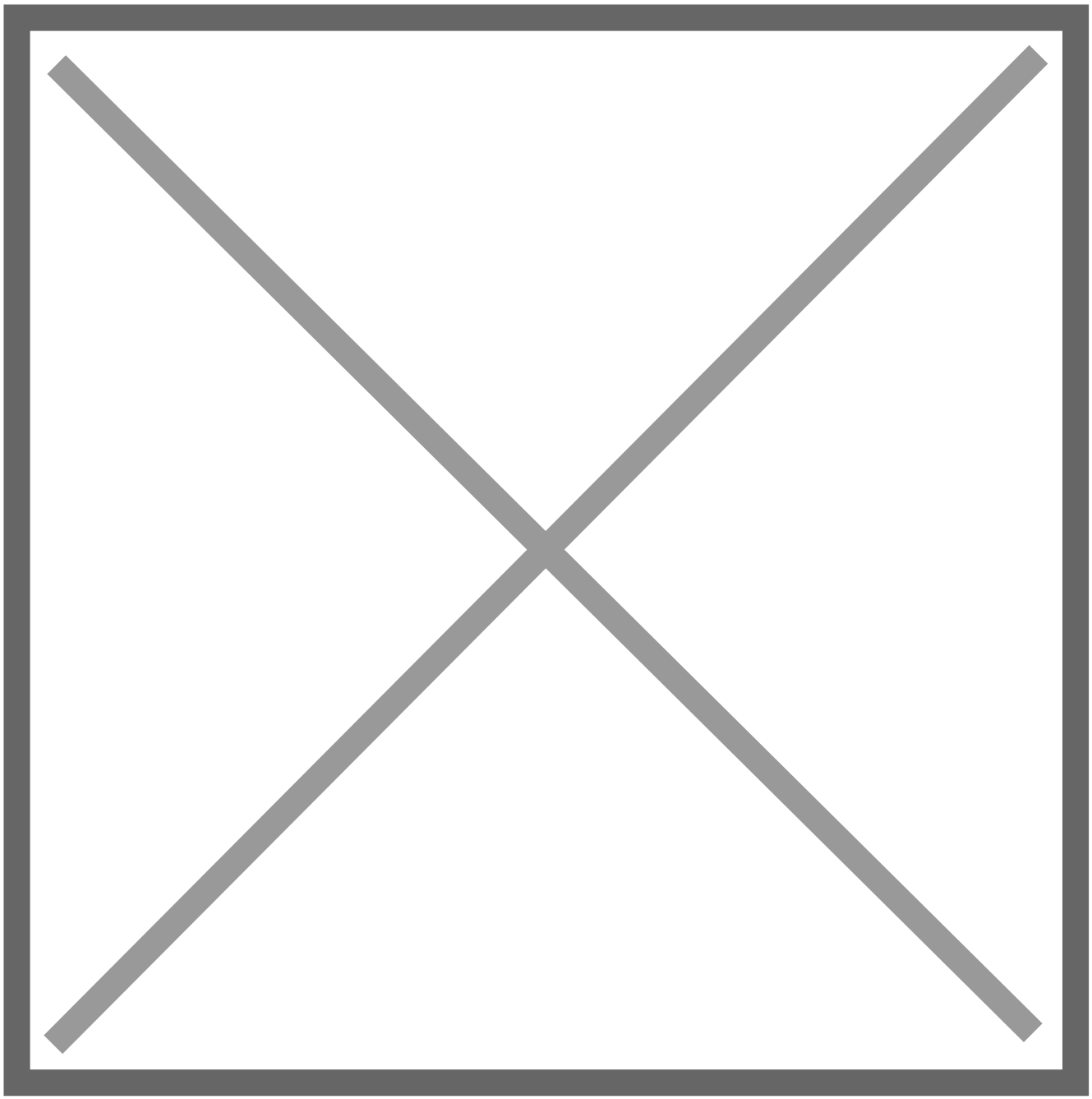
News



A file photo shows pilgrims making their way to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. As Dec. 12 approaches, millions of pilgrims are converging on the basilica, one of the most visited Marian shrines in the world. (OSV News/Reuters/Felipe Courzo)

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Mexico City — December 10, 2025
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As Dec. 12 approaches, millions of pilgrims are converging on the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, one of the most visited Marian shrines in the world. The feast honoring the Virgin of Guadalupe — celebrated across the Americas and in the Philippines — is again drawing crowds far beyond Mexico's borders.

Authorities in Mexico City expect between 10 and 12 million pilgrims in the days surrounding the feast, with families, parish groups, dancers and torch runners arriving from across the country. Roads near the basilica have been closed, security forces deployed, and the familiar rituals — roses, mariachis and the midnight singing of Las Mañanitas (the traditional Mexican birthday song sung as a "serenade to the Virgin") — once again signal the beginning of the hemisphere's most visible Marian celebration.

According to tradition, in 1531 the Virgin Mary appeared to an Indigenous convert, St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, leaving her image on his cloak after he gathered Castilian roses as a sign for the bishop. The tilma, considered miraculous by millions, is displayed prominently at the basilica and remains a focal point for devotion nearly five centuries later. The cloth has been studied extensively — second only to the Shroud of Turin, some experts say — yet the image's composition, including what appear to be 13 human figures reflected in the Virgin's eyes, remains unexplained.

Each December, devotion centered at Tepeyac — the small hill where Mary is believed to have appeared and beside which the current basilica was built in 1976 — extends far beyond Mexico. In the United States, dioceses with significant Latino populations prepare for processions, early-morning Masses, Matachines dancers and parish serenades.

In New York, an official pilgrim image from Mexico City has been displayed at St. Patrick's Cathedral since Dec. 1, drawing parish groups and visitors in the lead-up to the feast. Cardinal Timothy Dolan will celebrate Mass there on Dec. 12, following a pilgrimage through Manhattan. In the country's capital, the Archdiocese of Washington will hold its annual "Walk with Mary" Dec. 13 — a procession that typically draws several thousand people — beginning at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart and concluding with a rosary and Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

On the West Coast, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles held its 94th annual Guadalupe Procession and Mass on Dec. 7, continuing one of the city's oldest religious processions. The celebration followed a 2025 pilgrimage of the archdiocesan images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Juan Diego to more than 50 parishes.

On the feast's eve, Indigenous dancers and mariachis will gather at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels for Las Mañanitas before a midnight Mass. In the Diocese of San Diego, a long-established procession through North Park and a bilingual Mass will continue a tradition of more than half a century near the U.S.-Mexico border.

Further east, the Diocese of St. Augustine in Florida — the site of the first Mass celebrated on what became U.S. territory in 1565 — will mark the feast with a Dec. 11 Mass celebrated by Bishop Erik Pohlmeier at St. Joseph Catholic Church, followed by Aguinaldo Masses leading up to Christmas Eve, echoing customs familiar in both Latin America and the Philippines.

Aguinaldo Masses are a series of dawn Masses celebrated from Mexico, through Spain and the Philippines for nine days before Christmas, starting Dec. 16, to honor Mary and prepare for Jesus' birth, and are also known as Simbang Gabi in the Philippines.

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"These examples reflect a devotion that began with Hispanic and Filipino immigrants but has continued to grow across the church in the United States," said Gabriela Sakmar, president of the Detroit-based Federation of Associations of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

She told OSV News that the expansion of celebrations into parishes nationwide began "when Hispanic families set roots in this country" and requested that their pastors join them in honoring the feast.

"Bishops were quick to notice the devotion has been growing, and not only within the Hispanic or Filipino communities," she said. "Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patroness of the U.S. right-to-life movement, and the Knights of Columbus have a strong devotion to her as well."

Sakmar, who returns to Mexico annually though not in December — "too many people travel on those days," she said with a laugh — sees Guadalupe as a "bridge" in a divided society.

"That was precisely the mission of the Morenita ("little dark-skinned"), to unite Mexico's Indigenous population and the Spaniards," she said. "These were two completely different worlds, and evangelization seemed impossible. Yet after her apparition, we saw some of the most numerous conversions in our history." Some historians speak of over 10 million baptisms in the decades following the apparition.

"As a Hispanic," Sakmar added, "whenever I see Our Lady of Guadalupe in a parish, I know that I am welcomed there."

Throughout Latin America, Guadalupe's image is displayed in homes and chapels from Patagonia to the Panama Canal. Processions in Guatemala, Ecuador and Colombia mirror Mexican customs, while murals and banners frequently invoke her as a protector of migrants and the poor.

In the Philippines — where Pope Pius XI named her patroness in 1935 — thousands of faithful are expected to visit the National Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Makati City throughout the novena and on Dec. 12 to pray for families, migrants and the protection of unborn life.

At the Vatican, the feast is marked annually with a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, a tradition begun under Pope John Paul II and continued by Pope Benedict XVI and

Pope Francis. In a 2019 homily, Francis described Mary of Guadalupe as "woman, mother and mestiza," a figure capable of uniting divided peoples. The celebration is expected to continue under Pope Leo XIV, who told reporters Nov. 18 that he hopes to visit both the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima and the Basilica of Guadalupe soon.

What distinguishes Guadalupe from other Vatican-approved Marian apparitions is not only its antiquity but its distinct iconography and cultural resonance. The image on the tilma — often read as combining Indigenous and Christian symbols — portrays a woman neither fully Spanish nor fully Indigenous, clothed with stars and standing before the sun and moon. Many Mexican Catholics regard her as the first symbol of a new mestizo identity forged after the Spanish conquest.

Over centuries, her figure has moved from church walls to the mainstream of culture. She appears on street art, lowriders, storefronts, T-shirts and Mexican tortillas. Her image has been adopted by musicians, athletes, tattoo artists, and even gangs or drug traffickers — a sign, clergy often note, of the deep imprint she has left on the Mexican imagination, even when misused. For many ordinary Catholics, however, she remains a sign of protection, maternal closeness and identity.