

The Canonization of Saint Juan Diego,
as seen by an Anglo tourist,
July 31, 2002, Mexico City, Mexico.

The night before the Canonization, Pope John Paul II arrived at the Presidential Hanger, to be welcomed by President Vicente Fox and his wife. Soon the Pope headed to the Papal Nuncio's home for a night's rest. The streets were lined with people who cheered and waved as the Popemobile passed by. The same excitement the next day, and greater crowds waved to the Pope on his way to the Shrine. There was a feeling of celebration in the air, especially among the throngs of people who lined the pre publicized avenues the Pope would use on his way to the Basilica.

This Anglo tourist was up before dawn. The morning was cool; a light rain shower gave a freshness to the air. The buses were ready and waiting, the usual commotion in loading, and soon we were on our way to Tepeyac and the Shrine of Guadalupe.

It was necessary to park the tour buses a couple of miles from the Shrine, and the pilgrims made their way through the crowds, guided only by a sign held high by the group leader to show the way. The crowds grew thicker near the Shrine grounds, and it was necessary to make a lengthy detour to approach the special entrance. The walk was brisk. Somehow the pilgrims required to use a wheel chair kept up, or soon rejoined the tour group when progress was halted by a long line to enter the Plaza area, show badges, and pass through a metal detector. The Basilica was on one side of the Plaza, the old Church and Shrine Museum another, and two rows of bleachers the other two sides of the Plaza. Someone estimated over 18,000 people were in the Plaza area, with another 8,000 inside the Basilica.

The bleachers were already full when our group entered. The assigned area was a series of pens, with security guards to check badges. Each pen probably held about 400 to 500 persons. Once seated, one could not leave the assigned area even to use the portable restrooms placed in rows behind the bleachers.

The rising sun slowly dispelled the shadows of the plaza. As the day warmed, a light cloud cover and soft breeze provided comfort. The sense of excitement surged through the crowd when songs or announcements blared over the loud speakers. The Popemobile's progress and later the Canonization and Mass were projected on the large TV Screen erected for all to see. Screens were set up all over the city. An especially large one was erected in the Zocolo, in front of the Main Cathedral. At times the crowd broke into "Amigo" a song sung when the Pope first came to Mexico in 1979 and dedicated his Papacy to the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The crowd grew quiet when the newscasters chatter came over the speakers. The chatter continued for a good 30 to 40 minutes as the Popemobile came closer to the Shrine. The Popemobile was preceded by motorcycle escorts. It was flanked by two SUV's, probably containing security, and followed by a long entourage of cars.

When the Popemobile entered the Plaza the crowd was standing, and emotion and frenzy were common place. The Pope smiled and waved. Beautiful sand paintings decorated the Popemobile's designated route in front of the bleachers and adjacent to the "pens". It stopped in front of the Basilica and the Pope stepped from it to a devise used to transport him up the aisle to the Altar. A large choir and single tenor led the crowd in a welcome song, joined by the entire crowd. Once on the altar a desk was placed in front of the Pope. In a strong voice he began the Ceremony, "In the name of the Father and of the Son, etc..." An Archbishop spoke, and then a Cardinal. All spoke in Spanish. Then silence for a few moments. A shout, a horn, and a flute, were drowned by a steady drum beat. The Aztec Dancers danced in honor of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego. Traditional music followed and then proclamations and Litany of the Saints. The Pope read a proclamation, and when he completed, all understood, even those who didn't speak Spanish, the Canonization of Juan Diego was complete.

Mass began, the readings in Spanish, a Sermon by the Pope in his strong voice, the Consecration and Communion for all who wished to receive. The crowds lingered until the Pope exited the Plaza in his Popemobile, amid cheers and song "Mi Amigo, Juan Pablo, Segundo..."

No one doubted the Church is enriched by Canonization of this indigenous man whom the Blessed Mother chose as her instrument to bring her picture, the picture of Guadalupe, to all.