

Pilgrimage to The Lady of Guadalupe Shrine in Mexico City, Mexico.

By Jolanta Bugajski

On Thursday, October 19, 2017 at midnight, 12:00 AM, 50 pilgrims left the parking lot of Our Lady of Czestochowa Church in Worcester, MA and embarked on a long awaited pilgrimage to the holiest place in the Western Hemisphere, **Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine** in Mexico City, Mexico. Pastor, Fr. Richard Polek lead this well organized group of excited pilgrims. The early morning departure from JFK Airport in New York City went smoothly and the pilgrims arrived in Mexico City Airport at approximately 11:30 AM. At the airport, two pilgrims from Wyoming joined the group, which was promptly met by two tour guides: Lidia who spoke Polish and Mario who spoke English. Both guides shared their deep knowledge of this beautiful country's history, culture, traditions and everyday lives. They were very attentive and helpful to all pilgrims throughout the entire trip.

Prior to checking-in at the Ramada Hotel in Mexico City, the most populous metropolitan area which was built on the dried-up lake and has a population of 21.2 million people, the pilgrims visited the **National Museum of Anthropology**, which is the largest and most visited museum in Mexico. They also viewed **The Dance of the Flyers - Voladores** and tasted delicious local fruit as well as other snacks such as roasted nuts and fried spicy grasshoppers.

At the hotel, everyone then enjoyed a delicious Mexican dinner buffet and retired for a long overdue rest. Early next morning, refreshed and in a timely manner, everyone showed up for a wonderful buffet of a large variety of Mexican food including eggs, tacos with chorizo, Mexican crullers, burritos with mocha-rubbed steak, mini biscuit, spicy frittata, an assortment of fresh delicious fruit, juices and coffee. During each breakfast, lunch and/or dinner, pilgrims enjoyed delicious food prepared and served by very attentive hotel and restaurant staff. Unfortunately, a few pilgrims experienced but quickly recovered from the "Montezuma Revenge", which is a colloquial term for traveler's "stomach bug" contracted in Mexico or other Latin America countries.

With wonder and amazement, pilgrims toured **The Old and New Basilicas** as well as the surrounding gardens of **Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of Americas Shrine**, which commemorates the Virgin Mary's appearance to a humble Indian, Juan Diego on December 09 in 1531. Some pictures and shopping with local craftsman was followed by Holy Mass in Spanish in the very beautifully decorated by thousands and thousands of flowers new Basilica. Pastor, Fr. Richard Polek, who quickly learned a few words in Spanish, assisted local priests at the altar. All pilgrims joined thousands of faithful in this joyous celebration, filled with singing and prayers.

Pilgrims continued on, experiencing a very well planned guided tour covering thousands of years of Mayan, Aztec as well as Olmec Indian history. There was a tour of **Teotihuacan**, located 30 miles northeast of Mexico City, including the **Temple of the Feathered Serpent, Pyramid of the Moon, Avenue of Dead, and Pyramid of the Sun**. Brave and never tiring pilgrims climbed the **Pyramid of the Moon**, which was constructed by around 1 AD and 350 AD and has a base of 550 feet by 490 feet and is 150 feet high. Less than half a mile away, a large group climbed a much higher **Pyramid of the Sun**: 200 feet high and a base of more than 730 feet long on each side, which was completed around 200 AD. Pilgrims proudly raised a Polish flag at the top of this pyramid. This beautiful historical site was just one of many (too many to name all) that pilgrims visited and admired.

An excited group of pilgrims continued to travel to different historical sites learning about Zapotec, Mayan and Aztec lives and culture. They were sad to learn that in 1521, under the leadership of Spaniard, Hernan Cortes, previously thriving for thousands of years Aztec Empire of primitive people, who practiced rituals (some inhumane) was almost destroyed. While Spaniards introduced the Aztecs to domestic animals, sugar, grains and more modern farming, wars between Aztecs and Spanish invaders along with previously unfamiliar disease such as smallpox and typhus killed millions, approximately 75 percent of this population.

Each day, pilgrims experienced the history as well as the beauty of this beautiful large country with tall mountains, deep canyons, dry deserts, national parks, jungles full of all kinds of creatures as well as beautiful beaches. There were very memorable visits to villages where a few generations of families made tequila, mescal from the agave plant, chocolate, tavalera pottery, silver and natural stone jewelry, and beautiful rugs woven out of local wool colored with natural and never fading colors. These trades, arts and crafts showed the pride Mexican people take in their country. There was sightseeing in the city of Taxco known as a “silver city” and journey to **Cacahuamilpa**, one of the largest cave systems in the Latin America, which was carved by water and time. These visits left a lasting impression on all.

A comfortable bus was driven by a young but very experienced driver, Jonathan, who safely navigated the large bus on constantly curving roads high in the mountains leading into Mexico’s different regions full of history, culture, traditions and food. This very busy, full of wonder with the right amount of prayer, singing and fun trip ended in a beautiful, all- inclusive El Cano Resort on the Pacific Ocean in Acapulco.

In addition to a very well deserved time of relaxation, swimming in the pool and the Pacific Ocean, as well as walking on the beach, pilgrims participated in two more exciting events. They watched very courageous **Cliff Divers, “Clavadistas” in La Quebrada**, who dived from 100 – 135 feet high cliffs into the sea below. Also experienced a “royal treatment” given by the Indian family in the “lagoon” area. In this place, which seemed to be cut off from the civilized world, pilgrims explored the beauty of this “lagoon” by a boat ride, received a green mud facial mask (guaranteeing to look five years younger), massages, tasted “moon shine” mescal and ate a delicious lunch of local fish, chicken, shrimp, rice as well as fresh fruit drinks served in pineapple. Ladies as well as men added to their already full collection of locally, hand-made art. This Indian family truly represented the warm, kind hearted, smiling, singing, and always welcoming Mexican people all pilgrims encountered throughout this trip.

On Saturday, October 28th, with full hearts but also sadness, this large pilgrimage group departed from Acapulco for Mexico City. On Sunday, a final visit to **Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine**, participation in another Holy Mass prayed in Spanish, additional pictures and a few more purchases of religious and local art souvenirs, ended this very spiritual, informative, and beautiful pilgrimage. Some excited pilgrims are already considering attending a 2nd pilgrimage to this wondrous country already in plan for December 2018.