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Religious relic prompts a journey of faith to La Crosse

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La Crosse - It had to be a journey of faith that brought hundreds here to walk up a hill in 80-degree heat to see a religious relic - a tiny, half-inch-square piece of cloth.

Yet, for the faithful, the cloth was a tangible representation of the Virgin Mary.

Christians from throughout the state as well as from Minnesota and Iowa stopped to view the cloth, called the "Tilma of Tepeyac," which was part of a cloak worn by a man who said he saw the Virgin Mary more than four centuries ago in Mexico.

"I think it's really neat," said Mary Jane Griffin, who drove four hours round trip from Eau Claire. "I've seen relics before and I get so much out of it. Faith-wise you don't always get to see things, so this is something we can see."

The Tilma of Tepeyac, which has been in the archives of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles since 1941, is on a 20-city tour. La Crosse was the third stop after Denver and New Haven, Conn., for the *tilma*, which next travels to Springfield, Ill., and Sacramento, Calif.

A *tilma* is a cloak that was worn by Aztec Indians centuries ago. According to the story behind the Tilma of Tepeyac, a man named Juan Diego said the Virgin Mother appeared to him three times in 1531 and asked him to

Tilma Of Tepeyac



Photo/Michael Sears

Bishop Raymond L. Burke carries a small piece of the *tilma*, or cloak, of St. Juan Diego, while leading a procession Sunday from the Our Lady of Good Counsel Votive Chapel at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse



Photo/Michael Sears

Norman Crater of La Crosse prays at the relic in the votive chapel at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse. Tom Ambler of Beloit (right) was among the Knights of Columbus members who provided an honor guard.

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speak to the bishop of Mexico City and tell him that Mary wanted a church to be built at the base of Tepeyac Hill.

Juan Diego, who was canonized last year, picked roses at the Virgin Mother's request and wrapped them in his *tilma*. When Juan Diego opened his cloak to give the roses to the bishop he discovered a colorful image of Mary imprinted on the *tilma*. The faithful believe it was a miracle.

In 1941 the archbishop of Los Angeles led a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City to see the image of Mary on the *tilma*.

In gratitude, the archbishop of Mexico City sent a small piece of the cloak to the archbishop in Los Angeles, and now, it is encased in a small blue locket that on Sunday was draped around a 17th century statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe inside a plastic case. Two vases of white roses were placed next to the relic.

Thousands stood in line in Denver to see it, said Andrew Walther, coordinator of the tour.

"People have really been eager to see the relic and learn about the relic," Walther said Sunday.

La Crosse Bishop Raymond L. Burke asked organizers of the tour whether the relic could stop in this community on the banks of the Mississippi River. They obliged.

So Saturday, morning the Tilma of Tepeyac was brought to a chapel at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe of the Diocese of La Crosse, and Sunday afternoon another procession, led by Burke and the Knights of Columbus, carried the relic down the hill.

More than 300 people saw the relic on Saturday, and a similar number had stopped by on Sunday as of 2 p.m., said Andrew Brannon, interim executive director of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which opened last December.

"This is such a venerated piece," Brannon said. "To have a relic of this magnitude for such a young shrine, it means a lot."

Jane Noll traveled from Alma, about 60 miles away, with her husband and son, both members of the Knights of Columbus, to see the relic. Noll knew the story behind the *tilma* and wanted to see the piece of cloth because it's spiritually important to her.

"I'm a very big friend of the Virgin Mother. I pray to her often," Noll said.

Mike and Mary Jane Strube brought their three daughters from



Photo/[Michael Sears](#)

The tiny section of the *tilma* hangs around the neck of a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe under a glass case. The *tilma* is on a national tour.

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Wisconsin Rapids to see it.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance because I don't think we'll ever get down to Mexico" to see the entire *tilma* and picture of the Virgin Mother, said Mike Strube.

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