

EPILOGUE:

On Sept. 21, 1992, after a "hiatus of 132 years, the Holy See re-established full diplomatic relations with the Republic of Mexico." And, on Feb. 1, 1995, Pope John Paul welcomed Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo to the Vatican. It was a historic moment: It was the first official visit by a Mexican head of State to the Holy See.

As you travel through Mexico you see signs of Pope John Paul everywhere: his name graces streets, boulevards, parks, schools, cafés, stores and even shopping centres; his Popemobile, a gift from *Presidente* Vincente Fox, is displayed on the grounds at the Basilica of Guadalupe. There are statues, photos, paintings and plaques of him throughout the country. They say that no one in the world is more ecstatic about the beatification of Pope John Paul than the Poles. And the Mexicans?

They would be running a close second.

PRAYER TO OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE: JAN. 1979

Pope John Paul prayed this prayer before the Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in January 1979, after dedicating his papacy to her: "O Immaculate Virgin, Mother of the true God and Mother of the Church! We dedicate on this day all our being and all our love. We also dedicate to you our life, our work, our joys, our infirmities and our sorrows. We wish to be entirely yours and to walk with you along the way of complete faithfulness to Jesus Christ and His Church; hold us always with your loving hand."



A floor mosaic of Monterrey cathedral commemorates John Paul II's trip to Monterrey, Mexico in 1990

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## MY MEXICAN ADVENTURE

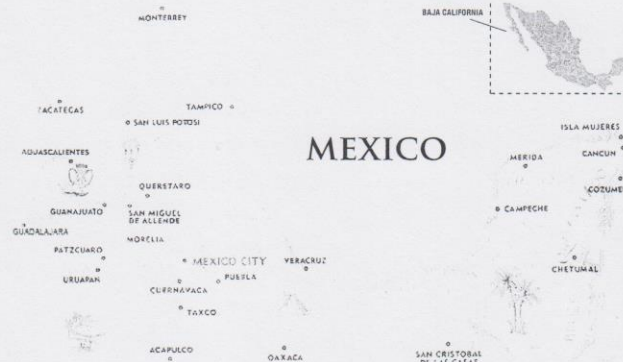
In the 1960s, I frequently took my vacation in Mexico. For one thing, it was much cheaper than Canada. For another, it was like another world or other worlds. I travelled by bus from Monterrey in the north to Oaxaca in the south, from Vera Cruz in the east, to Acapulco and Baja California in the west. Each part had its unique attractions.

About 1965 I went north from Mexico City to San Miguel d'Allende, a delightful town with its own charm. Many Americans retire to San Miguel. There on a modest pension they could live in high style, with a maid and cook at a remarkably low cost. I took a room in an attractive posada. It had once been a convent and had been confiscated by the government not long

after the anti-Catholic Benito Juarez had seized power in the 1860s. While there I learned of a grand festival to take place the next day in a small Indian village not far away.

About ten o'clock in the morning, after saying Mass in

a local church, I took a weather-beaten bus to the neighbouring village. All in the bus were Mexican Indians. When I had taken my window spot an Indian outside pressed his face near to the window and made a gesture as though he were cutting my throat. It was evident that tourists were not welcome. The Mexican beside me had a large bag, which pressed against my feet. This was not going to do me any good, as I soon learned.



At the village in front of the church, natives in native costumes were singing and dancing to the native music. It was a good opportunity to take pictures, which are still stored with my sizeable collection of photos. That same day I returned to San Miguel to make plans to leave for Guanajuato the following day.

Next morning, I took the bus to Guanajuato. Guanajuato had been at one time the silver capital of the world. The altar of the church had once been of solid silver. It was seized by the anti-clerical government forces many years ago.

On the bus beside me was an American doctor and we engaged in an interesting conversation. In Europe in World War II he treated many wounded soldiers. Sometimes he would not have the time to save an arm or leg when that could be done with more time. On one occasion he had and took the time to save an arm from amputation. The owner of that arm later became the governor of a mid-western State and appointed his wartime doctor as chief medical officer of his State.

The doctor told me further that when his wife died he went to live in Mexico. He had a hobby of searching for Spanish treasure cached by some of the early conquerors. He made one rich find and although law compelled him to turn over the valuables to the government he received a notable reward. He was not permitted to make a business of surgery in Mexico but was allowed to offer free services. So he practised surgery at a hospital in Guadalajara, where he met a young nurse and was married to her by the Cardinal of Guadalajara. With him was the sixteen-year-old son of that marriage. He and his son travelled to small towns in Mexico, bringing with them equipment for digging wells to obtain potable water. They offered their equipment free and usually the parish priest would provide the necessary manual labour. In this way, they were able to save many lives lost previously from polluted water.

In the course of our conversation we talked about religion. The doctor told me that he had been raised a Catholic but had lost his faith in medical school. His son was raised a Catholic and was faithful in his practice. The doctor said he should return to his Catholic heritage but had a deep-seated fear of go-

ing to confession. I tried to persuade him that no matter what he had done, the brief humiliation of a good confession would bring him great peace and joy and would be worth more to him and his family than all the Spanish treasure in Mexico.

It was at this stage of our conversation I showed him my left ankle, which had been near the sack belonging to the Indian next to me in the bus the day before. Already there were about eight or nine inflamed spots. The doctor looked at them and gave the opinion that they were infected fleabites. "Those could be quite dangerous" he said, "They could be a close relative of the bubonic plague." He told me that he spent some time in the East during the war and that a number of sailors succumbed to the bubonic plague from infected fleabites. The United States

spent a large sum of money on obtaining an antidote to those bites. After the war, when the need for it was small, money was not available to obtain the certification of the antidote for general use, so this was not done. However, the antidote was available in Mexico. He wrote me a prescription and advised me to go to the nearest pharmacy in Guanajuato when we arrived there. I thanked him



Our Lady of Guanajuato Basilica , Guanajuato

and promised prayers for him and his family.

On the outskirts of Guanajuato I noticed a fine looking hotel called the Castillo Santa Cecilia. After having obtained the suggested prescription at a pharmacy near the bus station, I took a taxi to the Santa Cecilia hotel. There I languished for three or four days. Even with the prescription I had severe sweats and took little more than water. Gradually I regained my strength and was able to enjoy some of the noteworthy sights of Guanajuato. I offered Mass in the central church, where once the altar was of solid silver. In the sacristy there was a life-sized statue of the boy Jesus. He had his forefinger to his mouth and at the base of the statue was the caution "Silencio." Until now I have in general kept silence about my "Mexican Adventure."

*Msgr. Vincent Foy was ordained in 1939. He was named Monsignor by Pope Pius XII in 1957. He earned a doctoral degree in canon law and has served as the head of the Archdiocesan Provincial Matrimonial Tribunal and as a parish priest. Ω*