

Bishops dedicate Americas to Our Lady of Guadalupe during pandemic

MEXICO CITY (CNS) – Latin American and Caribbean bishops have dedicated the Americas to the care of Our Lady of Guadalupe, praying for her “maternal protection” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a closed-door Mass celebrated Easter, April 12, at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City Cardinal Carlos Aguiar Retes prayed to the patroness of the Americas, asking her to transform “our fear into joy” and to comfort the afflicted.

“In these moments, like (St.) Juan Diego, feeling ‘small’ and fragile in the face of illness and pain, we lift our prayers and dedicate ourselves to you,” Cardinal Aguiar prayed.

“We dedicate our peoples to you, especially your most vulnerable children: the elderly, the young, the ill, the indigenous, immigrants, the homeless, inmates. We come before your immaculate heart and we implore your intercession: provide us, from your son, health and hope.”

“Most Holy Virgin Mary ... strengthen the moribund and comfort those who cry. May your maternal caress comfort the sick and may you accompany the health professionals who care for them. And, for all of us, Mother, be present and tender, and in your arms may we all find safety.”

The Mass was celebrated as the coronavirus pandemic spreads the length of the Americas, forcing countries to close borders and order quarantines.

Along with the loss of life, the pandemic is expected to cause

economic hardship in a region already rife with poverty and inequality – where quarantine can mean a loss of income for many. On April 12, the World Bank forecast an economic contraction of 4.6 percent in 2020 for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The dedication of the region to Our Lady of Guadalupe – often called “Empress of the Americas” – revived a tradition of seeking her intervention in times of crisis and during pandemics.

Churches throughout the region joined in the livestreamed Mass by ringing their bells at noon Mexico City time.

“In our communities exists a deep faith in the most holy Virgin Mary,” said Bishop Hector Cabrejos Vidarte of Trujillo, Peru, president of the Latin American bishops’ council or CELAM, which called for the dedication.

Speaking from a remote feed as part of the Mass, Bishop Cabrejos continued, “Always in difficult times or during epidemics, plagues and wars, we have prayed with confidence for the maternal protection of the Mother of God.”

Reading a message for the Mass from Pope Francis, Archbishop Franco Coppola, apostolic nuncio to Mexico, said, “His Holiness manifests his spiritual closeness in these moments of darkness, which, being illuminated by the light of the resurrected Christ, invites us to increase our love, renew our faith and strengthen our hope in him.”

The pope also told people, “Be bearers of the tenderness of Jesus to your loved ones, to those you are close to and, in a special way, to the neediest brothers and sisters, who face illness in conditions of abandonment and loneliness so that they can experience in their lives the joy of the mercy and closeness of the Lord.”