

## **Out of the crucible of unimaginable sorrow**

### **Michael Kirke, a Dublin journalist**

The lives of saints, even the lives of great but ordinary people, who may also be saints without our knowing it – and there is no contradiction between being great and being ordinary, – are often marked by tragedy and great suffering. We know, of course, that there is no such thing as holiness without a willingness to identify with Christ's Cross and bear for him whatever share of it he asks us to carry.

This was certainly a distinguishing characteristic of a woman who, next month, the Catholic Church will declare to be a beatified soul in Heaven.

On May 18, this lay woman, a scientist, a teacher, and much more, will be beatified in a stadium, more commonly associated with rock concerts than with displays of religious fervor and devotion. This woman, Guadalupe Ortiz, at the age of 19 was touched by a tragic event the like of which no one would ever wish to have to bear, that of accompanying her father up to the moment of his death at the hands of a firing squad.

Guadalupe bore this ordeal with exemplary forbearance. Who is to say that the marks of this cross were not part of the foundation on which she later built that life of dedication to God and service to her fellow human beings, across two continents. If so, this cross is at the heart of the Church's recommendation to us that we may now ask Guadalupe to intercede for us before God.

Guadalupe Ortiz was born in 1916. Her father was a military man. Because of that the family had to move around the Spanish territories as military orders dictated. She began her university studies in 1933 in Madrid. When the turmoil within the Spanish Republic erupted into full-scale civil war in the summer of 1936, Guadalupe and her mother were in the northern coastal town of Fuenterrabía. Her father, Manuel, was in one of the Madrid military installations and in temporary command of a garrison of under 2000 men. He joined the military rebellion led by General Franco but his post was very quickly overwhelmed by the Madrid militia loyal to the Government.

After their surrender all the commanders and officers involved were detained. Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Ortiz was arrested and sent to prison to await trial. The trial took place during

the first days of September and Ortiz was condemned to be shot. His family, led by his son Eduardo, a young doctor, who was actually a member of the pro-Republic Popular Front, appealed for clemency and for a time it appeared that they might be successful. However, when Ortiz learned that the clemency would only apply to him and not to the condemned junior officers of his unit, he refused to accept. He was faithful to that code of honour among soldiers whereby an officer will not accept clemency not given to his subordinates. Recently deceased US Senator John McCain followed the same code in the Vietnam War, choosing cruel solitary confinement in a Hanoi hell-hole, rather than accept release when his companions remained in prison.

On 7 September Guadalupe and her mother arrived in Madrid. At 9.30 pm the family received a telephone message that Ortiz would be shot in the morning. At midnight Manuel Ortiz was given the news, and his family arrived at 12.30 to find their father in the chapel praying. They remained with him until 4.30 a.m. when the militiaman ordered them to leave. On saying goodbye her father asked Guadalupe for her Rosary beads. They remained in the prison until after the fatal shots were fired. On leaving, they were given the death certificate.

In the message he scribbled to them, standing up, just before the execution, he wrote, “I repeat: be strong at heart. Being united, defend yourselves in the tempests of life. I ask for forgiveness if at times I have needed it. Pray for me every day. Continue being dignified, honourable and good as you have always been and remember that God knows why he has wanted things in this way.”

None of them ever forgot Manuel, and that last night from the 7th to the 8th September 1936 would remain a constant present in time for the family. Eduardo later recalled the composure of Guadalupe during that horrendous night:

“She showed her spiritual fortitude when, at the age of 20, she accompanied her father on the 7th of September until the early morning of the day of Our Lady – the Nativity of Our Lady – when he was shot in the Modelo Prison in Madrid.”

From her family, Guadalupe had absorbed by osmosis the faith and moral virtues that she cultivated throughout her life. Both in her personal conduct and in her role as teacher, she transmitted her faith, her values and her strength of character. She graduated and then began

teaching, for a time in a convent school in Madrid run by Loreto sisters, known as “las damas irlandesas,” because many of them came from Loreto Abbey in Rathfarnham, Dublin.

By this time she was searching for something which would give a fuller meaning to her life. What this might be she did not know – but when she met Fr. Josemaría Escrivá in 1944, the founder of Opus Dei, she found it, taking very much to heart those words of his, “Don't let your life be barren. Be useful. Make yourself felt. Shine forth with the torch of your faith and your love.” Guadalupe requested admission to Opus Dei that same year, 1944.

She then embarked on doctoral studies in Chemistry but after a time took leave of absence to go to Mexico in 1950, to help launch the work of Opus Dei there – the country whose patron was also her patron, Our Lady of Guadalupe. She returned to Europe in 1956, working in Rome with the Founder of Opus Dei for a couple of years. On returning to Madrid, she resumed her academic work, completed her doctorate which was rated with an outstanding *cum laude*, and won the Juan de la Cierva research prize. The press at the time commented on the novelty and importance of the practical applications of her research for increasing energy savings and maximizing the utility of recyclable materials.

In 1968, she helped found an innovative School of Domestic Sciences, similar to what at that time was called “Home Economics” in the United States. In 1972, this became the Centre for Study and Research in Domestic Sciences which was the origin of the Nutrition and Dietetics degree courses at the Faculty of Sciences in the University of Navarra.

In the early 1970s Guadalupe was diagnosed with heart failure. In April 1975, she had to stop giving classes. Nevertheless she commented, “I have to be happy, because it's good to recognize that one is not irreplaceable, and I need to let the doctors do their work.” A few months later her health took a sharp turn for the worse and her doctors decided to operate. The operation seemed to be successful but in mid-July she suffered a grave relapse. She went into a coma and died at 6:30 am on July 16, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Guadalupe was a distinguished scientist and by all accounts a wonderful human being. Was she a saint as well? All who knew her had no doubt but that she was, and began immediately to pray through her intercession, and then ask that the cause of her canonization be opened by the Church.

Her process of canonization was formally opened on November 18, 2001, with the Cardinal-Archbishop of Madrid presiding. He said in his opening address: "We are presented with a Christian life of great appeal and great depth. In the midst of simplicity, which was not simply a matter of public appearance, there is a human life with a rich trajectory, with decisive features and key moments, such as her encounter with the founder of Opus Dei, Josemaría Escrivá, which would open the path to her secular vocation to be a contemplative in the middle of the world."

The Postulator of the Cause, Rev. Benito Badrinas, affirmed: "Now that John Paul II wishes to show models of holiness that are closer to our own time, we consider how Guadalupe presents a lovable model close at hand. She was an indefatigable worker who confronted the problems of her time in a Christian way. She cared for the educational and spiritual needs of those around her, always with a friendly touch. In everything, her reasons for acting were love for God and neighbour."

In Rome, on 9 June 2018, Pope Francis authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to issue the [decree approving a miracle attributed to Guadalupe Ortiz](#) . Upon hearing the news, [Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz](#), prelate of Opus Dei, commented, "The life of Guadalupe helps us see how giving oneself entirely to the Lord, responding with generosity to what God asks of us in each moment, allows us to be very happy here on earth and later in Heaven, where we will be happy forever.

"I ask the Lord that the example of Guadalupe will encourage us to be courageous so as to face the big and small things of daily life with enthusiasm and a spirit of initiative, to serve God and others with love and joy."

The miracle consists of the instantaneous cure, in 2002, of Antonio Jesús Sedano, who at 76 years old was suffering from a malignant skin tumor next to his right eye.

One night, a few days before an operation was to remove the tumor, Antonio prayed to Guadalupe, asking with faith that the surgery might be avoided. The next morning, the tumor had completely disappeared. Subsequent medical examinations confirmed the cure. Antonio died twelve years later, in 2014, of heart disease. He was 88 years old. The skin cancer never appeared again.

Some months after the approval of the miracle the Holy See decreed that Guadalupe Ortiz would be beatified in Madrid on Saturday 18 May 2019. It will take place in the Vistalegre Stadium. Here, for more than a hundred years, people have been attending concerts, bullfights, political campaigns, videogame conferences... and also beatification ceremonies. Guadalupe, who lived with and for young people all her life, will be very much at home on this common ground.