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Relic from saint to be displayed

Piece of cloak from St. Juan Diego to visit

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BY DAVID CRUMM

FREE PRESS RELIGION WRITER

The electrical blackout in August that paralyzed Detroit delayed a long-awaited visit by a sacred Catholic relic until next week.

On Oct. 24, thousands of pilgrims from several states are expected to show up at Blessed Sacrament Cathedral, 9844 Woodward Ave., in Detroit, to see a tiny piece of fabric that the faithful believe came from the cloak of St. Juan Diego. The church describes him as a 16th-Century peasant who witnessed appearances of Mary, Jesus' mother, near Mexico City.

"When we had to cancel the two-day visit in August, we heard from people in Indiana and Ohio who planned to come," said Santiago Fernandez, a consultant in Hispanic ministry for the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit.

"Now, we will have it here for only one day, but we are starting very early so that people can come before work or anytime during the day," Fernandez said.

Juan Diego was canonized by Pope John Paul II in July 2002.

According to the church, Mary appeared to Juan Diego four times in December 1531 on Tepeyac hill near Mexico City. Her image was imprinted on his cloak, which has been preserved at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe at Tepeyac.

The fragment on tour was brought to the United States in 1941 and has been preserved in Los Angeles. The relic is called the Tilma of Tepeyac.

In Detroit, the cathedral doors will open at 5 a.m. Throughout the day, group recitations of rosary prayers will alternate with periods of silent prayer and processions past the relic.

"The piece of the cloak we are venerating is the size of a key chain," Fernandez said. "It's in a glass case, and we want people to be able to get close to it."

Detroit Cardinal Adam Maida will celebrate a mass at 7 p.m., followed by a reception, and the church will close shortly after that, Fernandez said.

"This should be a beautiful day," he said. "The whole story of Our Lady appearing to Juan Diego is so deeply ingrained in our culture. It's a part of our roots, of who we are as a people."

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