

## BLESS ME, ULTIMA BACKGROUND INFO (#3B)

### THE HOLY DIRT OF CHIMAYO

CHIMAYO, NM

Easter weekend. The sick and afflicted, the downtrodden, the lame and lonely come from across the world; riding in wheelchairs, leaning on crutches, mostly walking to this tiny church in the mountains of north central New Mexico. They come looking for a miracle. They come to kneel, pray, hope...but mostly, these pilgrims come on this weekend for a small handful of dirt.

Long before the first Spanish conquistador ventured into what is now known as New Mexico, the indigenous people of the land knew of a sacred place famed for its healing powers; a "Holy" place among the Indians, a place of sanctuary where even dedicated enemies laid aside their weapons of flint and stone to share in the "miracles" of this Holy ground.

In the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, the first missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church began to filter into these "bad lands", with the hope of bringing the Church's message of salvation to the "heathen and pagan" people that populated the region. On one such excursion, it was a monk named Bernardo Abeyta that first stumbled upon the place (and the legend) that is now known as the Santuario de Chimayo.

It was Friar Abeyta, perhaps, that added the most to the modern legacy of Chimayo.

He was in the hills near Santa Fe near the Santa Cruz River involved in the practice of penance and self-flagellation when he noticed a light coming from the ground nearby. Digging with nothing but his bloodied hands, he uncovered an old wooden cross carved with the image of "Our Lord of Esquipulas", the Black Christ renowned throughout Guatemala. Taking the cross back to the Church at Santa Cruz nearby, he was amazed to find it missing the next morning. To his amazement again, he found the cross back in the hole from which he had recovered it. This happened a second and third time, until finally, the Priest petitioned the Catholic hierarchy to erect a Chapel at the site of the buried cross—Chimayo.

It wasn't long after the Chapel was built that the Good Friar took seriously ill and finally was confined to bed. Realizing he was dying, he wished to visit the Chapel one last time, so wrapping himself in blankets he made the short trip on foot. As legend has it, as he approached, he spotted the figure of the Black Christ standing at the doorway. But when he came to the door, the apparition disappeared. Just then he fell to the ground and felt his strength return. His illness had abated and he fully recovered from that incident. This may well have been the first "Christian Miracle" at the site, but certainly not the last.



Chimayo has long been credited with miraculous healing properties; some argue it is the land itself, in that particular spot, that provides a physical healing to those that come. Others argue it is the spring water that bubbles up from subterranean levels that possesses the "power of healing". As such, a modern day gift shop adjacent to the old mission, which was built over the very spot the natives held sacred, sells bottles which can be filled with "holy" dirt and "holy" water, both found within the walls of the mission church. Tourists and the afflicted from across the world visit the site very day in hopes of finding miracles to address their worst and most desperate health needs. The Catholic faithful, of course, say it is "faith" in combination with the water or dirt that actually possesses the power to heal those in need. But despite your particular beliefs, there is de facto evidence inside the church itself to support paraphernalia left behind by pilgrims who claim they have found the healing they sought within the confines of the old church walls. There are

stories and documented testimonials from literally thousands, some disabled since birth, that testify to the healing properties of this special place. Amazingly enough, one Santa Fe resident may have schemed himself out of an insurance fraud conviction! Claiming severe neck and back injuries due to a car accident, the individual received insurance money and later visited Chimayo to be completely cured.

Side note: during the 1986 soccer world cup in the U.S., our national team sprinkled some dirt from Chimayo into their boots before a match.

Every year, without fail, area newspapers carry reports of those that were "healed" as a result of their efforts. Scientist and researchers have demonstrated a degree of interest as well, traveling there with sophisticated equipment to test the properties of the soil and water. If they have found anything of significance, they apparently are keeping it to themselves. But the faithful say, despite what science may or may not prove, they will continue to believe in the "Miracles of Chimayo."