

The Day of the Dead is Here!

Many are quick to relate the annual Aztec Day of the Dead with Halloween every year. However, the annual holiday with Aztec and Catholic roots is much more than simply orange flowers and painting skulls, and has nothing to do with witches, ghosts and goblins.

Multitudes of Spanish-speaking people around the world celebrate Dia de los Muertos each year beginning Nov. 1 and running through Nov. 2. The holiday dates back more than 2,000 years to the Aztec empire and honors the dead. The Aztecs believed the spirits of their ancestors passed on to the underworld, and when a loved one died, they placed skulls on Aztec temples to honor the person. Skulls remain a part of the tradition today.

In the post-Spanish conquest era, the celebration was moved from August to November to coincide with the Catholic Holidays of All Saints Day and All Souls Day.

“We are honoring Catholic and Aztec traditions and we are celebrating great souls that died and moved on,” said Amar de la Cruz, who travels back to Mexico City every year for the celebration, told *The USA Today*.

Rebecca Cuevas, professor of Mexican studies at the University of Northern Colorado, says the dead are often honored with “offerings”, including candles, food, photographs and Mexican marigolds. Catholic symbols, including crucifixes, are a large part of the celebration as celebrants offer Catholic prayers to honor those who are deceased.

Food, such as tamales, rice and sweetbread rolls, are placed near a table or a grave to commemorate a loved one, and the belief, *The USA Today* reported, is that the deceased will “feast and be merry” with the food.

A grinning skull face often used in the celebration of the holiday represents the Aztec goddess Mictecacihuatl, who is known as the “lady of the dead,” was believed to rule the underworld and watch over the skeletons of the dead.

“She ruled the underworld and in our history was often depicted with a smiling skull,” Cuevas said.

In sharp contrast, as believers in Jesus, our hope of seeing our loved ones in the after life can only be obtained through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. {eoa}

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