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History

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El Dia de los Muertos

Cultures all around the world have different traditions and holidays that are celebrated. It may be a big or small tradition yet it is a tradition that celebrates the culture. The Mexican culture has a special festivity that is called El Dia de Los Muertos which translates to The Day of the Dead. Though the holiday name may sound morbid, it is a tradition that has ties with the nation's religious belief and honors deceased loved ones. It is a celebration that takes place on November 1st and 2nd.

El Dia de Los Muertos celebration dates more than 3,000 years ago when the indigenous people of Meso-America , the Nahua (Aztecs, Mayans, Toltecs, Tlaxcaltec, Chichimec, Tecpanec) first started this tradition. This tradition is so strong and well rooted into the Mexican culture that it has been able to withstand five centuries of colonization. They were able to withstand when the Spanish conquered Mexico and time after that the tradition keeps going.

The day of the Dead is a celebration where the souls return to the world of the living. Altars are built where loved ones place their ofrendas held in graveyards. The altars are decorated with lots of candles and flowers, such a cempazuchitl. It is very similar to the marigold however it is known as the indigenous marigold. Candles are placed all around the altar to bring

light and most often incense is also placed on the altar. A line of cempazuchitl flowers petals is placed on the ground leading to the altar. This is done to help the soul find it's way to the altar.

Altars are not only decorated with flowers and candles but are also decorated with food. The bread of the Dead is a special type of bread that is made especially for this occasion. It is a sweet bread that has bumps that appear like skeleton bones. Drinks are often found in ofrendas such as hot chocolate, water, bottles of soda, and in some cases alcoholic drinks. In these offerings fruits can also be found, anything that the deceased liked is most likely to appear in the altar or ofrenda. If offerings are made for children it is most likely to have toys. Food is placed out for the loved ones who have made the journey to come back.

It is believed that at midnight of the 31st of October, the gates of heaven are open and the souls/spirits of the deceased children come down to be with their families. November 1st is reserved for the angelitos which are the little children who are to be with their families for 24 hours. On November 2nd the souls/spirits of the adults come to be part of the celebration and see what their family or loved one has placed on their altars. On that evening they begin to take apart their altars and the celebration comes to an end. El Dia de Los Muertos falls on All Souls and All Saints day the Catholic holiday. As mentioned before the Day of the Dead has ties with the nation's religious belief. Some may attend to special masses and include religious beliefs into the celebration. In central and southern Mexico is where the colorful celebrations are taken place. Those in the rural areas of Mexico that have indigenous or tribal influence celebrate El Dia de Los Muertos differently to those who in central Mexico. They follow the different traditions and practice that their ancestors practiced.

This celebration may sound like a day that is filled with sadness yet it is a remembrance of those deceased loved ones. Families go out of their way to have the best possible altar or ofrenda they can have to present to the spirits of their loved ones. It is a tradition that has been able to keep the community together and close. It is a celebration that has been able to go through generations and will continue to.

"Part of our tradition in Mexico is to not be scared of death and to smile at it. It's a celebration of our ancestors as they were when they were on this earth, alive. It was never a sad thing or a scary thing." - Gennaro Garcia

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