

Día de Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is the traditional Mexican holiday that honors the memory of departed family, loved ones, and ancestors. The culturally-rich celebration can be traced back to the time of the Aztecs, 3,000 years ago. Though the theme is centered around death, this is a holiday of remembrance, respect, and life-affirming joy for our beloved family members and friends who have passed. This tradition is rooted in the native Mexican belief that life on earth is a preparation for the next world and of the importance of maintaining a strong relationship to the dead. The holiday is celebrated throughout Mexico and over the years has become popular throughout the United States and many other parts of the world.

Many of the symbols and traditions of *Día de Muertos* developed from pre-Christian, indigenous religious practices and gradually became synchronized with Christian observances. Today, the multi-day celebration coincides with the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls on November 1st and 2nd. The customary *Día de Muertos* ritual is for families to build *ofrendas*, or altars, honoring their loved ones who have gone into the spirit world. It is a time to gather and welcome the souls of the dead in their annual journeys back home. The *ofrendas* are traditionally adorned with *cempasúchil* (marigolds), *calaveras* (skulls), *calacas* (skeletons) and *catrinas* (richly dressed skeletons), copal (incense), candles, *papel picado* (intricate tissue paper banners), sugar skulls, *pan de muerto* (bread of the dead), photographs, and other mementos to honor those who have died, including their favorite food and drink. It is a means of always keeping the departed alive in our hearts by celebrating their lives. It is believed that as long as our loved ones remain in our memories, they never cease to exist and remain alive. Only when they are completely forgotten do they fully perish.

This year, the Cathedral marks its third year of *Día de Muertos* observances and welcomes back Mexican-American, New York-based designer and artist Sebastián Gámez, who conceived and created the two *Día de Muertos* *ofrendas*. They are dedicated to all those who have passed, especially those who have died as a direct result of mass shootings and the gun violence epidemic that plagues our country. So far this year, there have been over 500 mass shootings in the U.S, and targeted shootings are on the rise, disproportionately impacting marginalized groups.

May we honor their memories and hold them and their families in our prayers and consciousness. Join in the celebration of remembering loved ones who are no longer with us. We invite you to participate by bringing in mementos or photos, or by writing your loved ones' names and placing them in the designated areas. The *Día de Muertos* *ofrendas* will remain on display through November.



La Calavera Catrina or *Catrina La Calavera Garbancera* (ca.1910-1913) by Mexican artist, illustrator, printmaker, cartoonist, and lithographer José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913, México)