



➔ Mexicans revive Day of the Dead

El Día de los Muertos, The Day of the Dead, is a deeply rooted tradition in Mexico. No matter where they are, Mexicans celebrate it in the period around Halloween: Oct. 31, Nov. 1, All Saints Day, and Nov. 2, All Souls Day.

In New York, with the rapid influx of Mexican immigrants in recent years, the celebration of The Day of the Dead is overflowing the confines of their community and reaching out to the whole city. This year, for the second time, the city's Halloween Parade will have a little bit of hot Mexican *sabor*.

"For us, it's very important to join the Halloween parade, and contribute our own traditions," said Mayra García, of Mano a Mano, a Mexican cultural organization in New York.

"It is like a mission to rescue El Día de los Muertos, so it won't be lost for the community of Mexicans who live here."

A holiday dedicated to the dead sounds definitely morbid in the U.S., but for Mexicans, it is an occasion to remember loved ones who have died and a celebration of the continuity of life.

The great poet and Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz expressed that the Mexican "... chases after [death], mocks it, courts it, hugs it, sleeps with it; it is his favorite plaything and his most lasting love."

In Mexico, The Day of the Dead is a joyous occasion, with families filling cemeteries to decorate with flowers and candles the graves of their loved ones, or *panteones*.

"Mexicans look at death in a different way," said Juan Martínez, an engineer and theologian. "For us, it is not the end of life but its continuation."

Traditional altars are built in homes, and people bring favorite foods, photographs, flowers and candles of their dead relatives and friends.

"The altars are a family tradition, and they are dedicated to a specific person," Martínez said. "For example, if it is dedicated to *el abuelo* [grandfather], it is filled with mementos of him: photos, a favorite dish, the cigarettes he liked, etc.

"We believe the dead come to visit, and we have to greet them with the things they liked," he added. "It is a gift we give to the dead person."

El Día de los Muertos is so strong a tradition that it has endured the Spanish colonization that tried to eradicate it as a pagan ritual, Mexico's contradictory feelings toward its native civilizations and peoples, and even the assault by the overwhelming economic and cultural power of its closest neighbor to the north.

And it goes on unabated even in the U.S.

In New York, Mexicans do not usually go to the cemetery because the number of them buried here is still small. It is estimated that about 700,000 Mexicans live here, but theirs is a young - about 23 is the median age - and recent immigration.

In this year's Halloween parade, 100 musicians and dancers from the Mexican communities of the Bronx, Brooklyn and Yonkers will join and display traditional dances.