

Cinco de Mayo

A Celebration of Mexico



The History of Cinco de Mayo

Cinco de Mayo, which translates to “Fifth of May,” marks the anniversary of the Battle of Puebla, a historic victory of Mexican forces over the French military under Napoleon III in 1862. In 1861, Benito Juárez became president and, facing a country in financial ruin, defaulted on foreign debts. British, Spanish, and French forces, in turn, invaded Mexico in the same year. While the British and Spanish negotiated deals with Mexico and withdrew from the country, French forces remained in Mexico, marking the beginning of the Franco-Mexican War/War of the French Intervention (1861-1867). France aimed to challenge the influence of the United States in the Americas and to take control of Mexico. It succeeded in temporarily ousting Juárez and instituting Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria as Emperor in 1864.

At the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, Juárez gathered Mexican forces, largely consisting of people of indigenous and mixed ancestry, to face the significantly larger and better-equipped French forces. Led by Texas-born General Ignacio Zaragoza, the Mexican forces were able to defeat the French and provide hope for the Mexican people. The Battle of Puebla became a rallying cry for the continued struggle against the invasion of France. Following the conclusion of the war, Juárez was restored to power and the city of Puebla de Los Angeles was renamed Puebla de Zaragoza, in honor of the fallen hero.



Celebrating Cinco de Mayo

The commemoration of the Battle of Puebla continues to this day in Mexico and the United States. In Mexico, it is primarily celebrated in the State of Puebla while in the United States it has come to be celebrated in regions with significant Mexican-American populations as part of a larger celebration of Mexican history and culture.

Cinco de Mayo celebrations involve festivals, parades, battle reenactments, and speeches. Food, music, and dancing are hallmarks, featuring mole poblano (a signature dish of Puebla), mariachis, and folklórico dancers. In Puebla, the annual parade draws over 20,000 people to the Boulevard Cinco de Mayo. The forts which were the sites

of the battle, Fuertes de Loreto y Guadalupe, have been restored and are included in a large complex on the northeast of the city, known as the Centro Civico Cinco de Mayo, to invite all to learn about the history of this Mexican victory.

The popularity of Cinco de Mayo in the United States reflects the celebration of vibrant immigrant communities and their culture and heritage, which is woven into the diverse social fabric of the nation. Immigrant communities bear great gifts for the world and the Church by sharing their culture and experiences and enriching societies with their strength, hard work and care for community.



Puebla is the fourth largest city in Mexico. The historical center of the city is an UNESCO World Heritage site.

SOURCES:

- <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/118001/Cinco-de-Mayo>
- <http://www.history.com/topics/holidays/cinco-de-mayo>
- <http://www.visitmexico.com/en/forts-of-loreto-and-guadalupe-in-puebla-mexico>
- <http://gomexico.about.com/od/cinco-de-mayo/p/cinco-de-mayo-in-puebla.htm>

“Cinco de Mayo has come to represent a celebration of the contributions that Mexican Americans and all Hispanics have made to America.”

~ Joe Baca

Reflection Questions

1. How may this historic victory in Mexico parallel to the current struggles of a country in search of justice and peace?
2. In what ways is the principle of solidarity reflected in the contemporary celebrations of Cinco de Mayo around the world (particularly in the US)?
3. How does the expression of culture relate to the respect of the dignity of the human person (especially recalling immigrant communities around the world)?



Prayer

In the spirit of a celebration of Mexico, may God grant us understanding and compassion...

For the historical struggles of Mexico in forming an independent and flourishing nation,

For the awareness of the current struggles of Mexico in securing a diverse, peaceful and prosperous nation, and to alleviate the violence, discrimination, and suffering of its people,

For the respect for cultural traditions and celebration of Mexican heritage around the world,

For the recognition and admiration of immigrant communities, particularly Mexican immigrants in the US, in celebrating their culture and welcoming them into a diverse and harmonious society. Amen.

