

Celebrating our departed loved ones.

Days before the 1st and 2nd of November where the living of this world celebrate the festival of the dead, or of the faithful deceased, the municipal authority of Puente Piedra closes all of the adjacent streets to the Zapallal cemetery, located in the circle of Zapallal, to divide the area into lots that vendors may rent to set up booths where they sell food, beer, flowers and other items they can to help establish good communication and relations with the beloved deceased.



Once a year, on the 1st and 2nd of November, thousands of people; children, youth, adults, and elders visit the cemeteries and other burial grounds of the Carabayllo district to be reunited again with their dead loved ones, with those souls that at one time or another left this earthly world and today rest in eternal peace.

The entrance to the Zapallal cemetery, which faces the hills of Lomas de Carabayllo, is the gathering place where thousands of visitors come to meet their deceased loved ones bringing food, traditional sweet breads, music played by hired musicians, flowers, candles, beer, and supplicants. Others, with more money, bring brushes and repaint the facade and the metal grilles that cover the places where their beloved lie.



At the entrance of the cemetery are the supplicants who, for a tip, will practice their prayers *"Lord all powerful and omnipotent, You who spent three days in the grave giving to every burial the spirit of hope with the faith in the resurrection, grant your dead servant peaceful rest until with your life and death you resurrect him in the last day, and permit him to see the light of your face..."*



This huge reunion between the townspeople and their beloved deceased is what inspires the songs, prayers, music, food and beverage... The happiness, the festivity...

The people spend many hours watching the tombs and niches of the deceased as a form of support to the dead that are in purgatory, in their long march through the world beyond, before arriving at their final dwelling. This Christian religious festival, mixed with many Andean elements, is the perfect communion between the earthly world and the world of the dead, the world beyond...



A relative standing in front of the tomb of the deceased takes the initiative and says "Gregorio you who find yourself in the highest with the Lord, here your relatives and some friendly musicians have come to play you a response, appreciate it with a lot of heart, it is from your living relatives". Then the musicians play their versions better musical pieces of the Group 5 and some huaynos huancaínos. .

According to popular Andean religious customs, the playing of two very sad melodies is used to awaken the soul of the deceased from its long dream so that it can reunite once again with its relatives...Then, once communication with the deceased has been established, members of the family place, near or on the grave, the foods that he or she liked while still living and the musicians begin to play the songs or rhythms that the he or she enjoyed in life...

According to popular belief, the souls of the deceased continue to be present in the life of the community and in the life of the family. Therefore, a series of rites and behaviours are carried out in front of the deceased so that they do not become upset and

punish or disturb the living relatives. To avoid all of this, the relatives take care to please their deceased with music, foods and beverages and to create an atmosphere of festivity that is central to the celebration of this catholic holiday.



"We place before him his favourite soup, meal, fruits, and beer as well as anything else that he liked" says one woman who travelled from San Benito and appeared to be a sister of one of the deceased.



The most faithful believers affirm that: "From noon until midnight the soul of the deceased leaves purgatory to reunite with all of the family. That it is why he or she should be accompanied to the base of his or her tomb. If the family is not present between these hours, the deceased feels neglected and so when she returns to purgatory she tells other souls that she was alone and that nobody greeted her..."

In all of the religious festivals celebrated by Peruvians, and particularly in the celebration of the deceased, one will always encounter a series of symbols and representations, for example the tributes, the table of foods, the traditional breads, the musicians, the supplicants, the drinks, etc. All of these symbols express the importance that Peruvians place on family, social, and community relationships. They call it reciprocity. Therefore, this festival represents a way of being as a people, as Peruvians with their culture and beliefs.

The relationships that the people establish with the dead also provides them with such religious elements as the responses, songs and funeral melodies, the lighting of the tombs with candles, and the mourners´ that cry inconsolably before the grave sites.

In this festival where beliefs, customs and even superstitions are mixed, we ask ourselves: How does one come to understand that which is religious inside the culture of a people?



Our celebration has deep Andean roots marked by the belief of our permanent connection to the land, and explains this religiousness by means of figures, symbols, and images as a way to communicate with that which is sacred, with the divine being, but also as a way to maintain relationship with the community and with the family.

The Festival of the Dead, as well as other Andean religious celebrations, is a traditional Peruvian religious celebration that represents and proclaims our way of how to be a community.



Nelson Figueroa
CPDR El Día del Pueblo.
Translated by Michael Sinkler