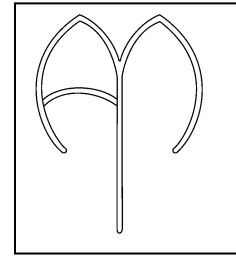


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CELEBRATING QUINCE AÑOS
(CELEBRATING 15 YEARS)

What is the celebration for the Quinceañera?

History:

A tradition that has gained popularity among many Mexican American communities is normally when a young lady reaches the age of 15 years, she has a celebration called *Quince Años* (e.g., 15 years). The young lady celebrating her 15th birthday is also referred to as a *Quinceañera*.

History, culture, and tradition suggests that the quince años (pronounced *key-n-say an-yos*) ritual has its roots in the practices of the tribes of Meso-America. The civilizations that flourished there, developed elaborate rites of passage for their warriors and maidens. Some claim that the quince años custom probably dates to the Mayas and the Toltecas for its foundational roots. It was considered then that a *muchacho* (a boy) was not a person until he reached the age of 15. It was at this time that he was presented to the tribe community. Likewise, the young lady was also presented to the community. For the young lady however, the ceremony included the commitment and responsibility she had to the community. The community, in turn, then accepted her as a committed and responsible member.

The quince años celebration is **not** a sacrament, however the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist are integral parts of the celebration (e.g., the Sacrament of Penance must be celebrated by the Quinceañera before the ceremony and the celebration of the quince años is generally celebrated during the Mass).

The quince años celebration displays the qualities of popular religiosity (e.g., an inculturation of faith) between the Hispanic and non-Hispanic communities. It marshals the sentiments towards the main ritual subject, the Quinceañera, who is dressed as a “princess” and who receives an outpouring of love by her parents, godparents, friends, sponsors, and guests in the forms of gifts and a shared expense for the celebration activities. The celebration is part of the Mass in the church, because the Quinceañera, before the gathered assembly, stands and petitions for God’s blessing and continued care, so that she can make her way to the fullness of womanhood, which for Hispanics, includes an increased relationship with God.

The religious aspect of the ceremony can help the Quinceañera become aware of her faith and to live out her Christian commitment. In this regard, the young woman is at the center of the event. Participation in the rite reveals that popular piety forms part of her religious identity and sensibility and that her relationship to God is important.

The Scriptural readings, the prayers, and the final blessing remind her and those present of God's providential care throughout our lives.

In the Catholic faith and this Quinceañera ceremony, Our Blessed Mother Mary continues to be the model of all women. In particular, she embodies motherhood par excellence and reflects all that Latinos value about mothers. The quince años links the Quinceañera to God through Christ and to the Virgin by and through the prayer of dedication. This flowering young woman gives thanks for being the image and likeness of God and also asks Mary to be her model of what it means to be a Christian woman.

The selected liturgical texts present Mary as everyone's spiritual mother. Nonetheless, this celebration's combination of texts, symbols, the gender of the Quinceañera, and the stage of life she is in, empower her to take on a special status in the Christian community as a model of what Christian life and womanhood should be. In general, it is to be more like the Blessed Mother: committed, nurturing, loving, compassionate, and life-giving.

Symbols:

During the Quinceañera's ceremony, several symbolic gifts may be presented to her by her godparents or sponsors (also known as *padrinos*). These include:

1. **A cross or medal** symbolizing the religious expression of faith. The young lady is placed under the protection of the saint represented by the image on the medal. Sometimes a little cross or crucifix may also be given.
2. **The ring** symbolizes the tie and the responsibility the young lady has to the Catholic community, the Church, and to her God.
3. **The crown or tiara** symbolizes the triumph of the young lady over childhood and her ability to face the challenges ahead.
4. **The flowers** symbolize the newness of her commitment and responsibility to the community and are generally presented as a gift to Our Blessed Mother. Flowers symbolize new life at any event.
5. **Bible or Prayer book and Rosary** symbolize the important resources of her faith to keep the Word of God ever present and alive in her life.

It is the hope of the Hispanic Ministries Committee, at the Ave Maria Catholic Church that this general information sheet on the Quince Años celebration will help you to become better informed of the traditions of our parish's Latino brothers and sisters and inspire an interior desire to participate in their future parish activities to promote a more unified faith community. Come! Join! Celebrate!

(SR: Primero Dios: Hispanic Liturgical Resources, Mark R. Francis and Arturo J. Pérez-Rodríguez, @1997 and Religious Celebration for the Quinceañera, Angela Erevia, @1980)