

GUATEMALA: HOLY WEEK

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Holy Week celebrations ritualize Jesus' last days. In Antigua, Guatemala, processions are held through the streets with religious floats where people dress up and reenact the Stations of the Cross. During this time, citizens of Antigua decorate the streets with alfombras—or carpets made out of flower petals, fruits, vegetables, and sawdust. Groups of families and even businesses plan the design of these floral carpets months ahead to pave the way for the various processions. These elaborate creations are then destroyed by the hundreds of feet of those carrying the sacred images and by the penitents who follow the processions. Some more elaborate carpets, which are made by the different brotherhoods associated with particular religious images, can be found in front of the altars of the city's churches.

For the Guatemalan faithful, the whole cycle of spiritual preparation during Lent, along with its culmination in Holy Week and Easter, is epitomized by the artistic creation of these beautiful carpets. The significance of these elaborate constructions is clear: The cycles of life are beautiful, yet fleeting. People offer the work of their hands as a sacrifice to God who sent his Son who gave his life to reveal God's beautiful plan for the Redemption of the world.

PREPARING TO CELEBRATE IN THE CLASSROOM

Make sure to read all directions given below for supplies, activity instructions, and the order of prayer. In addition, help the students locate Guatemala (and Antigua) on a world map or globe. Either before or after the prayer, show them pictures of Holy Week alfombras.

CREATE AN ALFOMBRA

1. Prior to Holy Week, invite the students to work as a class or in small groups to create an alfombra using: craft paper or poster board and crayons or markers; torn bits of colored paper and tape or glue (in mosaic fashion); images of vegetables, fruits, and things of nature torn or cut from magazines (collage style); or, if time allows, easily accessible natural materials such as pods, seeds, twigs, leaves, and feathers. (This would be more in keeping with what is done in Antigua.)

Encourage the students to incorporate into their design(s) scenes from the Holy Week Scripture stories you've studied in class and the liturgical symbols and colors used in the Church's celebration of Holy Week.

Save the alfombra to use in the following week's opening or closing prayer.



Alfombras GUATEMALA: HOLY WEEK



CREATE AN IMAGE OF A SAINT

2. Invite the students to prepare an image of a favorite saint on a piece of drawing paper measuring 8.5 x 11 inches. Encourage them to draw the face of the saint in the center of the paper, and to create a border or art for the corners of the page that represent the life and work of the saint they choose. (As an alternative, invite the students to choose a holy card or image to carry in procession.)
3. During Holy Week, put #1 and #2 together and celebrate a Holy Week procession! Spread out the alfombra(s), and have students hold high their saint images. Invite a volunteer to lead the procession, during which the feet of the students walk over the alfombra again and again.

As the students process, sing a Holy Week refrain they know by heart, such as a Hosanna, your parish's Lenten Gospel Acclamation, the refrain of Marty Haugen's "Adoramus Te Christe," the refrain of "The King of Glory," or "Jesus, Remember Me."

CONCLUDE WITH A PRAYER

4. Conclude the procession by offering the following prayer:

**Loving God,
your Son Jesus carried his Cross
out of love for the world.**

**May our steps during this Holy Week
follow in his way of love, sacrifice,
and service. We ask this through
Christ our Lord.**

Amen.

You may wish to conclude the prayer by "destroying" the alfombra, as is traditional. Invite each student to tear off or cut away a piece of the alfombra to take home and place on the family prayer table during Holy Week.

