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Personally re-discovering Latino Catholicism in Los Angeles BY MAGALÍ DEL BUENO

My name is pretty obvious in declaring my Latino heritage, and my list of ministry service and commitments at parish and school also openly proclaim my Catholic identity.

Yet, until very recently, I did not know how these two parts of myself fit together; what did my Hispanic roots have to do with my Catholicism? And what did all of this have to do with growing up in this City of the Angels?

Perhaps you may agree that such questions are timely as an increasing majority of Catholics in Southern California are Hispanics, and, according to Ken Johnson-Mondragón of the Instituto Fe y Vida which tracks demographics, the figure is approaching 70 percent. I have come awake to the reality that I am part of that 70 percent who lives in the world of "in-between," as theologian Roberto Goizueta calls it. In Spanish, there's a phrase that describes this identity well: "No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá," meaning "I am neither from here, nor am I from there."

So how do I and other Hispanic Catholics deal with this question of identity and origin? How does this affect our faith? Most importantly, how can we all as one Catholic family best serve one another as Christ exemplified for us?

The questions grew in me as I began a Master's degree in Theology at Loyola Marymount University and the past year has been one of discovery for me of Latino Catholicism's uniqueness in the U. S. Starting in my U.S. Latino Theology class, I learned how far back the presence of Latino Catholics in California goes by looking at the first maps of the Los Angeles area. Streets, ranchos, plazas, all belonging to these early settlers made real to me the depth of Catholic roots in California.

Beyond the classroom, I was assigned to participate in a retreat experience with the Valley Missionary Program in Coachella. The "yesterday" I encountered in the faded maps joined "today" through the faith-filled people of Coachella. The retreat focused on the Kingdom of God and served as a lived example of God's love as we shared faith with other Catholic Latinas who had stories that were both heartbreaking and hopeful.

One evening after dinner, the small informal choir sang in Spanish: "I don't know if the Church has risen or if the Heavens have come down; all I know is that this room is filled with God's angels and that God, Himself, is here."

At that moment, one of the older women, Delmy, looked at me and said in exuberant Spanish, "Imagine living like this, with angels all around you, filled with great joy and peace. That must be what Heaven is like!" Delmy's observation of the present Kingdom of God touched my heart. Her capacity to listen to the Spirit at that moment was a great

gift to my faith and to the other Catholic women, young and old, with whom I shared that weekend.

The experience of the retreat led me to reflect on our Hispanic sisters and brothers in the Catholic Church in light of Pope John Paul II's teaching of a "new evangelization." He tells the Church in At the Beginning of the New Millennium that "A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups. This should be done, however, with the respect due to the different paths of different people and with sensitivity to the diversity of cultures in which the Christian message must be planted."

What Pope John Paul II meant by "new" is that "evangelization can be new in its ardor, methods and expression. It must be adapted to the people of our day." In this retreat, through the faith of these people, this new evangelization was flowering.

Thanks to my experiences on the retreat and in my course, as well as in my mentorship of other Latino students at LMU and my leadership in developing a Latino Spiritual Retreat on our campus, I am better able to understand the realities of Hispanic Catholics in California. There are urgent questions we must ask about how to multiply efforts like those of the Coachella community, and about really knowing Hispanic Catholics, not just knowing about them.

The new evangelization requires us to ask what we can do to better enable them to live lives of faith. In California we can model a church that is truly universal in its embrace of traditions and cultures, what can we do to foster such an embrace?

These are questions for all us as Catholics to explore together, and we can begin with a series of events at Loyola Marymount University beginning on October 7. where the LMU community will host "Latino Catholicism in L.A.: Myths, Realities, and Possibilities" with an address by Auxiliary Bishop Gabino Zavala and comments by Dr. Fernando Guerra, director of the Center for the Study of Los Angeles; Ellie Hidalgo, pastoral associate at Dolores Mission Church in Boyle Heights; and Dr. Hosffman Ospino, director of the National Symposium on Hispanic Ministry.

We can see these events as ways for us to continue to grow as a Catholic family by working together to serve, learn from, and grow with a community that has celebrated their Catholic faith here since the very birth of our city of the angels. I hope you will join me on our campus; you are most welcome.

Schedule of events: ---Oct. 7, 7 p.m.: "Latino Catholicism in L.A.: Myths, Realities and Possibilities," University Hall 1000, LMU. ---Oct. 10, noon: Latino Heritage Mass, Chapel of the Sacred Heart. ---Oct. 10, 1-4 p.m.: Fiesta. All events are free and open to the public. Information: http://www.lmu.edu/academics/extension/crs/events/101007.htm.

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