



A relic of St. Jude Thaddeus is transported in a glass urn on a trajinera through the canals of Xochimilco, Mexico City, Sunday, Aug. 11, 2024. (AP/Ginnette Riquelme)

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It was no ordinary Sunday on Mexico City's famed Xochimilco canals.

Instead of tourists and locals hanging out with friends, the brightly painted boats known as "trajineras" were filled with Catholics honoring a relic of St. Jude Thaddeus, one of Jesus' 12 apostles and patron saint of impossible causes.

A wooden figure holding a bone fragment of St. Jude's arm was kept in a glass case while it glided through the calm waters as part of a month-long visit to Mexico, a country that is home to nearly 100 million Catholics.

The relic arrived in Mexico in late July after touring the United States in its first-ever trip out of Rome. Devotees will be able to pay respects in a dozen Mexican parishes through Aug. 28.

"Our faith for St. Jude Thaddeus is a family tradition," Iris Guadalupe Hernández, 36, said while waiting in line to board one of the trajineras escorting the relic early Sunday.

Her mother's devotion for the saint began four decades ago, when St. Jude granted her what she wished for the most: a family.

"My mother was unable to have babies," Hernández said. "She had three miscarriages before asking St. Jude for a miracle, so after she got pregnant with my brothers and me, she promised that she would spread the word and our family has honored him since then."

Like Hernández, thousands of Mexicans gather to celebrate St. Jude every Oct. 28 — his official feast day — at San Hipólito church in Mexico City. The saint is one of the most revered figures in Mexico after [Our Lady of Guadalupe](#), one of several apparitions of the Virgin Mary.

"He is one of the most significant expressions of popular piety among the humblest," said the Rev. Jesús Alejandro Contreras, a priest in the Xochimilco's diocese. "In our neighborhoods, where there are mainly merchants, devotion toward this apostle is seen as an intercession for difficult causes."

Contreras, who was among those who traveled through Xochimilco's canals in the one-hour trajinera procession, said that being close to the relic is a way to "come into contact with the Lord."

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Parishioners were already waiting in nearby boats when the relic left the dock at 8 a.m. Once the procession began, devotees clapped in rhythm with the Mexican traditional songs performed by a local band.

Hundreds more awaited for the relic's arrival at the end of the canal, where a procession on foot made its way to Xochimilco's cathedral.

In the Mexico City neighborhood, locals are also devoted [to the "Niñoopa,"](#) a life-size wooden figure of a baby that is believed to be about 450 years old. Its origins are unknown but it was found after the Spanish conquest, and Catholic families in Xochimilco typically keep images of him in their homes.

"Our faith here is divided," said Arturo Espinosa, 52, standing close to a makeshift altar carrying a figure of St. Jude. "There's a lot of faith here in Xochimilco and the Niñoopa is our main representative, but we also have other emblems and participate in these celebrations."

The festive spirit of the procession was led by "comparsas," groups of local dancers who are devoted to a specific image of the infant Jesus. Each member wears a long velvet robe, a big drum-like hat and a mask depicting an old man. The costume is meant to mock the Spanish conquerors.

Francisco García, 33, jumped steadily in his brown velvet robe while he and fellow comparsa dancers waited to make their way to the cathedral, where the archbishop welcomed the relic and celebrated Mass in its honor.

"My mom is sick, so I came to ask St. Jude for her surgery to go well," said García, who had already seen the relic on July 28, right after it arrived in the capital and was taken to the Zocalo, Mexico City's main square.

"I was so moved I started crying," García said. "I told him (St. Jude): 'You called for me, so here I am.'"

The relic was to be on display in an oratory next to Xochimilco's cathedral until nightfall, and its trip through central Mexico's churches resumes Monday. It is scheduled to leave the country in late August.