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Today we celebrate hope and renewal, not the end of the world

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NCR Today

In March, I accompanied a Guatemala Catholic sister, Gloria Leon, on a speaking tour along the East Coast. I wrote about this in a blog then, but I think it is worth repeating now that we have come to the end of the Mayan calendar. Gloria is Mayan, as are many of the sisters in her community, Sagrada Familia. They incorporate Mayan prayer styles into their daily prayer and ritual.

Gloria led two groups here in Mayan candle ceremonies and described to them and to a third group the significance of the end of the Mayan calendar.

In Guatemala, she says, there are more than 22 indigenous groups, each with its own traditional language, customs and dress. However, what they all have in common is the Mayan ancestry.

The ancient Mayans were good observers of space. They studied the movement of the planets and the stars. They invented various calendars to measure time. The calendar that dominated is called *la gran historia*, "the great history." It measured out 5,125 years.

This Mayan calendar completes its cycle today. Some people think the end of this Mayan calendar signifies the end of the world. (At this point in Gloria's presentation, which she gave in Spanish and an interpreter translated, many in the audience laugh nervously.)

But on the contrary, in accord with the Mayan culture, in the course of this time, the earth and humanity will be renewed. Instead of destruction, there will be renewal. The Mayans see the date Dec. 21, 2012, as a triumph of the sun over the darkness of the night.

The completion of the calendar is compared to the rebirth of a new sun and the beginning of a new era. This date is a significant spiritual event and symbolic for all of humanity. The Mayans believe this new age will bring justice, transparency and a greater understanding of the spiritual world.

The new Mayan cycle is a time to initiate or begin a renewal and to live with the hope of a better world.

That's what Gloria told us. In myself and in the groups that gathered to hear Gloria, I felt a sense of hope that we can make a new beginning. I carry that hope with you, dear reader, into the new year and into the new Mayan epoch.

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