

## MEET PATRICIO

*This semester in our Seminary's main study program we have students from a number of cities around Mexico, as well as several different countries, including Bolivia, Chile, El Salvador, and Spain. Since our classes are done by Zoom, only rarely do I have a chance to visit with my students face-to-face. In February, however, Patricio Abarca, one my students from Santiago, Chile, came to Mexico for a visit and we had a chance to get together and chat in person.*

*Among other things, Patricio shared with me his interesting story of how he became Lutheran. He grew up in a Pentecostal church, but when he was in his late teens he began feeling increasingly unhappy there, especially because of the judgmental attitudes of people at his church and other things that he found troublesome and oppressive. A friend invited him to attend a Lutheran church, yet it was a church where they followed the old, traditional liturgy, which he found extremely strange due to his Pentecostal background. In spite of the fact that he didn't like the liturgy much, what made him decide to stay was the strong emphasis on God's grace, which he found really transforming and powerful. Eventually, he decided to become a member.*



*Patricio later transferred to the Lutheran congregation of which he now forms part, Good Samaritan Lutheran Church. His pastor is Rev. Izani Bruch, who is also the Bishop of the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile](#) (IELCH). Last year, Patricio was elected to serve as Secretary of the national IELCH Synod Council (see group photo at right). Patricio also serves as Vice President of his congregation.*

*Patricio is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at the Silva Henríquez Catholic University in Santiago and also teaches at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. He works with both undergraduate and graduate students, focusing especially on educational evaluation. He is also working on a PhD in Education and researching the topic of methodologies for generating dialogue among adolescents and youth for his dissertation.*



*Patricio is not yet sure if he would actually like to become a pastor. He has increasingly become active helping out Pastor Izani at his church and often leads the service when she has to be traveling. He has even grown to like the liturgy and enjoys leading it—but using the newer ELCA Spanish hymnal rather than the old, traditional hymnal that the Lutheran church he first visited was using!*



*When I asked Patricio what he liked most about his theological studies at our Seminary, he said that he loves being able to raise all of the questions he has about the Christian faith freely and wrestle with those questions in a spirit of openness and dialogue. It has been a real pleasure working with Patricio and learning from him as well!*

### TEACHING NEW TESTAMENT IN MEXICO

One of the courses I am teaching this semester is Theology of the New Testament. While teaching in Mexico is in many ways different from teaching in the United States, one of the things that has always caught my attention when teaching biblical studies here is that the social and cultural realities in Mexico and Latin America allow the students to grasp certain aspects of the New Testament accounts that most students in the U.S. have never experienced.



The Gospels and Acts, for example, describe the manner in which Jews from all over the world made pilgrimages to the temple at Jerusalem to celebrate feasts such as Passover and Pentecost, often traveling long distances. Every year in Mexico City we experience the same kind of reality when people come from rural areas all around Mexico to the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe on her Feast Day, December 12. Most walk extremely long distances in order to feast, dance, celebrate, and worship together at the Basilica. Our house is just a couple of blocks away from one of the four main paths the pilgrims take to go there. Seeing crowds like this makes it easy to understand how Joseph and Mary got separated from the boy Jesus when they were walking back to Galilee from Jerusalem after Passover.

Because many of the pilgrims come from rural indigenous areas, they speak their own native languages and often do not speak much Spanish. This makes it easy for my students to understand what happened on Pentecost, when the apostles began speaking in different tongues or languages to people from all around the world gathered at the Jerusalem temple and they all marveled at hearing their own languages being spoken.

The New Testament also describes the manner in which non-Jews worshiped pagan gods and idols. Paul reminds the Thessalonians how they “turned to God from idols” (1 Thess 1:9), and other passages speak of altars and offerings in honor of pagan gods and goddesses, such as Artemis in Ephesus (Acts 19). The same type of thing is an everyday reality in many places in Mexico, especially in rural areas where each town has its own patron saint, like the local gods in antiquity. Just as those who turned away from those gods often faced reprisals and persecution from their family and friends, so also my students understand very well what it can be like to be ostracized and reviled for not participating in activities devoted to the saints.



One other interesting point has to do with the way in which days are counted here, since you always count the present day as the first day. Thus, to say “every other day” in Spanish, you say, “every third day.” To say “in one week,” you say, “in eight days.” So while in English it sounds odd to say that Jesus rose from the dead “on the third day,” in Spanish it makes perfect sense, since Friday was the first day, Saturday the second, and Sunday the third. Likewise, Pentecost is fifty days after Easter or Passover, because it is forty-nine days (seven times seven) plus the day you start counting!

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