

THE HISTORY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FESTIVAL

In 1886, Fr. Domingos Governo, our first pastor, was assigned to construct a new mission church, originally Holy Ghost Church in Centerville, now recognized as our Holy Spirit Church of Fremont. The following year, a Holy Spirit festival was held to celebrate the completion of the new church and in honor of our church's namesake, The Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit Festival is one of the oldest celebrations of its kind in California. Its origin dates back to the 13th century and is associated with St. Queen Isabel of Portugal who devoted her life to the Holy Spirit.

In the 13th century, when Portugal was in the grips of a famine, Isabel prayed to the Holy Spirit to spare the Portuguese people from it. Soon after, ships arrived in the port of Lisbon, and their cargos relieved the country from certain disaster. Isabel then summoned the citizenry of the country, both rich and poor, and they gathered in the royal chapel to celebrate Mass. When the "Veni Creator Spiritus" was chanted, Isabel chose a humble peasant girl from the crowd. As an act of humility, she had the bishop place the royal scepter in the peasant's hands and the royal crown on her head.

At the end of Mass, all were served a meal of bread, gravy and meat, which is called "Sopas de Carne". This is why a queen, a crown and the coronation, are always part of the Holy Spirit Festival celebration. The pastor chooses a young woman from a family of our parish. The young lady serves as side maid for two years before she is queen.

An honor maid is also chosen by the pastor to carry the queen's bouquet during the procession while the queen carries the crown and scepter. Other young ladies from our parish are invited to be part of the Queen's Court and celebrate & process with the Festival Queen.

Many miracles were performed in the life of St. Queen Isabel who was canonized in 1625. The most well-known miracle happened with her husband, King Dinis. He knew of her devotion to the poor and that she often left the castle to take them food. The king felt this was not appropriate for the queen to do as she had servants to do her bidding. On one particular day when Isabel was carrying food for the poor, her husband encountered her and asked her what she was carrying in her cloak. When she said "roses", the king knew full well that they were not in season and, once again, he knew she was going to feed the poor against his wishes. He demanded she open her cloak. Upon doing as he requested, the food which she hid in her cloak was changed to roses and dozens of them tumbled to the floor. The festival queen and her attendants carry bouquets of roses as a remembrance of this miracle. With Festival 2015, we celebrate 129 years of this wonderful tradition. Our pastor, Father Mathew Vellankal, embraces this celebration and invites all parishioners to participate in our Festival.

The mission of the Festival is in thanksgiving to honor the Holy Spirit and to support our parish community in treasuring the rich history and faith-filled tradition our church was founded on which unites all of us through our Catholic faith.