



ALL HALLOW'S EVE

A bit of history . . .

Halloween is shortened from "All-hallow-evening," the eve of All Hallow's Day, which is now known as All Saints Day. (All Saints Day became was placed on November 1 by Pope Gregory IV in 835; All Souls Day on November 2 in 998.) Millions of children celebrate Halloween each year with costumes, parties, and hi-jinks. But what are they celebrating? Where did these customs arise?

Halloween has its origins in the ancient Celtic festival known as Samhain; from the Old Irish *samain*). The festival of Samhain is a celebration of the end of the harvest season in Gaelic culture, and is sometimes regarded as the "Celtic New Year". Traditionally, the festival was a time used by the ancient pagans to take stock of supplies and slaughter livestock for winter stores. The ancient Gaels believed that on October 31, now known as Halloween, the boundary between the alive and the deceased dissolved, and the dead become dangerous for the living by causing problems such as sickness or damaged crops. The festivals would frequently involve bonfires, into which bones of slaughtered livestock were thrown. Costumes and masks were also worn at the festivals in an attempt to mimic the evil spirits or placate them.

In pagan times, October 31 was New Year's Eve, a night of evil and terror when all hell broke lose. Goblins and ghosts were abroad that night, while witches celebrated their black rites as the spirits and souls of the dead roamed the earth. To frighten the evil spirits and to bolster their own sagging spirits, our ancestors created a din with bells, horns, pots and pans, (just as we still do at midnight on December 31st), and built fires to frighten the witches or perhaps burn them if they might get caught. On the afternoon of October 31st, village boys would go from house to house collecting fuel for the midnight fires. Everyone was expected to contribute some peat or "coal pieces" to help burn the witches. Those who did not received dire warnings of the evil consequences that might follow.

Over 1,000 years ago Christians confronted these pagan rites of appeasing the lord of death and evil spirits. But the early Christians didn't simply speak out; they tried to institute a Christian alternative. All Hallow's Day (November 1) was a celebration of all "the holies" – those people who had died faithful to Christ.

All Hallow's Day, the feast of All Saints on the first of November, used to be celebrated in the spring. (The Eastern Church still observes it on the first Sunday after Pentecost.) But in the eighth century it was transferred to November on the Western calendar, where it

became the climax of the autumn season, a harvest festival celebrating all whom God has called to glory.

Halloween in our culture today has become an odd mixture of tributes to Dracula and roaming spirits, TV superheroes and comic characters, and participation in innocent harvest festivals and costume parties.

Literally, of course, it is the eve of All Hallows - a preparation for the observance tomorrow of the Feast of All Hallows or All Saints. That feast gives the assurance that there is a state of being that stretches beyond our life here on this earth – an affirmation of the essential spiritual nature of human life. People are made for more than can be experienced over our lifetime spent in this world.

The Apostle Paul underscores that when he writes to the Ephesians, that the highest role reserved for human beings is, as he puts it, "to rule with Christ in the heavenly world. And God has done this to demonstrate for all time the extraordinary greatness of his grace in the love he showed us in Christ Jesus."

So this Christian season brings us a comforting reminder that there is a destiny designed for us, assuring us of a continuing existence, and it's a promise endorsed by Jesus when he spoke of the many mansions that he has prepared for us. (Hallowe'en assures) us that God's love stretches far beyond death.

Certainly of all people, Christians should be joyful. The challenge is to use the creativity of the Creator to celebrate both the light and life He brought into this world, and His victory over evil – and evil spirits – which extends into the next. We can continue to sing our songs of thanksgiving for the creation of the world, while we look forward to that everlasting New Year at the end of time, when all things will be gathered in at the Final Harvest and "God shall be all-in-all." (Corinthians 15:28)

Light against darkness. Life against death.

The Halloween Pumpkin

The Lord has been known by many names throughout history; surely "Great Pumpkin" is not the strangest. For those of us not yet called to glory, the world goes on, and like Linus, we, too, keep vigil in the pumpkin patch, awaiting his coming.

And while we sit there carving our jack o'lanterns, we remember these words of St. Paul: Your attitude must be that of Christ. Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself... Because of this, God has exalted him. (Philippians 2:6-9)

Could there be a better symbol for our Christian life than the harvest time jack o'lantern? Are not we, like Jesus, called to be emptied out and filled with light? That is scary, to be sure. But there is always a smile on the face of the Great Pumpkin.

An Evening Hymn for Autumn

To sing after the evening meal or at bedtime in those dark autumn nights toward the end of October as winter is coming on.... (Sung to the tune of "Frere Jacques," three times, each in a slightly higher key, with the lights out - except, of course, for the candle in your smiling Halloween jack o'lantern!)

O Great Pumpkin,
O Great Pumpkin,

Give Us Light!
Give Us Light!

On An Autumn Evening,
On An Autumn Evening,

Give Us Light!
Give Us Light!



Soul Cakes

From the English Catholics we get begging from door to door, the earlier and more pure form of "trick-or-treating." Children would go about begging their neighbors for a "Soul Cake," for which they would say a prayer for those neighbors' dead. Instead of knocking on a door and saying the threatening, "Trick-or-treat," children would say either:
A Soul Cake, a Soul Cake, have mercy on all Christian souls for a soul cake!

or

Soul, soul, an apple or two, If you haven't an apple, a pear will do, One for Peter, two for Paul, Three for the Man Who made us all.

While Soul Cakes were originally a type of shortbread, it is said that a clever medieval cook wanted to make Soul Cakes designed to remind people of eternity, so she cut a hole in the middle of round cakes before frying them, thereby inventing donuts! Fresh plain cake donuts would be a nice food to eat on this day.





ALL SAINTS' DAY

All Saints' Day is one of the major festivals of the Christian Year. The word "saint" in this designation is used in the scriptural sense of anyone who is a faithful believer. So this feast serves as a commemoration of all God's "servants departed this life in thy faith and fear."

Some symbols . . .

- A combination symbol of the cross and crown serves well for this day since it is a sign of the Christian's victory over death. In Revelation 2:10 John says, "Be faithful unto death, and will give you the crown of life."
- Still another figure for this day is the hand of God pointing downward with thumb and two fingers extended, surrounded by rays. This reminds us that "the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them." (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1)

Themes . . .

- The day revolves around all the faithful servants and believers of God – living and those who have died. We are always surrounded by a **cloud of witnesses** (Hebrews 12:1); those faithful Christians who have died. When we die, a new and everlasting life begins with God and others who have died before us. The sacredness of persons is celebrated, remembering that they are all creations of God.
- **Baptism** is an important element of All Saints' in that it is the sacrament of Christian initiation that all Christian saints, living and dead, share as members of the Body of Christ.
- The unique personality, gifts, talents, and experiences of every individual are given by God to be valued and used in the building of the Kingdom. Being **good stewards of God's gifts** means looking at our lives for clues about what we have to offer that will serve others in Christ's name. To become the people God intends us to be is to find our greatest happiness and deep fulfillment.

Through the eyes of a child, All Saints Day can mean:

- We are all called to be saints, using our talents and lives to serve others, loving them as God loves us.
- Famous saints are examples, showing us how to be followers of Jesus.
- When we die, it is the beginning of a new life in which we join with others who have died and are close to God and Jesus.
- Life in the Kingdom of God is life in a new way, without sorrow or pain, a life of joy.

Activities for All Saints' Day

Look at the list of saints in the Prayer Book's calendar (pp. 19-33).

Think about the many ways that people in any period of history (including our own) have expressed their love for God in service to others. Show the qualities of peoples' lives, whether famous or ordinary, in some visual form: a mural, a display, a mobile, an altar-hanging, a collection of objects that symbolize loving acts, or a parade of costumed persons showing how they help or serve.

Many groups, especially Asian Americans, use All Saints' Day as an opportunity to remember and respect family members who are elderly or who have lived in other generations. This might be the occasion for telling about where our families have come from and lived, what their lives were like, and what values that we honor they have passed on to us.

Our names are symbols of who we are, and our Christian names tell who we are in our new life in Christ. A study of names and their meanings, of how our names show we are particular people loved individually and personally by God can help us see ourselves as particular saints of God whose lives are offered in loving service.

Biblical illustrations of Jesus' calling of the disciples, or invitations to others to follow him, can stimulate discussions about how we and others can be followers today. Newspapers offer contemporary examples of such persons, many of whom provide genuine inspiration when we take time to notice and celebrate their often quiet and unnoticed acts.

Share with a family or other group the lives of persons (living or dead) whom you have always admired or wished to meet, saying what particularly attracts you to them and giving their names if you wish. Perhaps you might want to cite family and friends who have been influences or have helped you in some way. Writing such people a letter of gratitude, however simple, might be rewarding for everyone.

Visit a cemetery and read examples of how friends and loved ones have honored the dead on tombstones both now and long ago. Perhaps rubbings might be made from the tombstones, with appropriate permission. Making and discussing a "living will" is another way to render service to others. This might be a time to look at the memorials in your Church and talk about what they have meant.



An Intergenerational Event

Purpose: To explore the origins and meaning of Halloween and All Saints' Day and celebrate these two related events in a Christian family setting.

This Event is designed for individuals and families to explore All Hallow's Eve and All Saints' Day through various learning centers around a room, such as the Parish Hall or Undercroft. Participants may go to each center, or spend the entire evening at one. Directions for each center should be posted, along with the necessary materials. Add a Halloween costume parade for all ages. Refreshments can be made available throughout the evening. Parents are asked to stay with their children at the centers – there are no teachers – we are all teacher/learners this evening!

Centers:

Clouds of Witnesses:

As a family, talk about someone you knew and loved who everyone remembers that has died (recently, or in the past - family, friends, pets, etc.). Choose a cloud and write the name of that Christian who has died that you would like to remember today. Tape your cloud (or clouds) to the wall. (Post info regarding "clouds of witnesses" from Hebrews 12:1)

Jack O'Lanterns:

With construction paper, draw a Halloween face on a pumpkin to take home. (Post info about a "Christian use" of the jack o'lantern; light in the darkness)

Family Banner posters:

Using construction paper, markers, crayons, scissors, glue or any other supplies found here, design a family banner about your family. All Saints' Day is a day to remember our Baptism into the Family of God. Look up your Christian names and their meanings. Any symbols? What is everyone's baptism date? Birthday? Anniversary? Home? Ancestry? Traditions? (Post info on All Saints' and baptism)

Present day Saints:

We know a lot of saints who have influenced us or helped us in some way. Write a letter of thanks to that person, or draw them a picture. Mail it to them - or better yet, deliver it to them in person!

God's gifts:

God has given each of us a unique personality, gifts, talents, and experiences. What can we offer to God that will serve others in Christ's name? Write it on a slip of paper, or draw a picture. Tape your "gift to God" on the large present.

Church "saints":

Have someone take your family's picture with a digital camera and print it out. Write your family name on the picture and tack it to the bulletin board. "We sing a song of the saints of God . . . patient and brave and true."

Apple Bobbing:

An autumn country tradition is to bob for an apple! Can you do it? Once you bite an apple - it's yours!

Refreshments:

- Coffee, etc.
- Apple cider
- Popcorn
- Doughnuts

Resources for All Saints' Day

For children:

Beckett, Wendy. *Sister Wendy's Book of Saints* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1998).

Demi. *Mother Teresa* (Simon & Schuster, 2005).

_____. *The Legend of Saint Nicholas* (McElderry, 2003).

dePaola, Tomie. *Christopher: The Holy Giant* (Holiday House, 1994).

_____. *Francis: The Poor Man of Assisi* (Holiday House, 1999).

_____. *Patrick: Patron Saint of Ireland* (Holiday House, 1994).

Hartman, Bob. *Early Saints of God* (Augsburg Fortress, 1998).

Hodges, Margaret. *Joan of Arc: The Lily Maid* (Holiday House, 1998).

Mayer, Marianna. *The Twelve Apostles* (Dial, 2000).

Norris, Kathleen. *The Holy Twins: Benedict and Scholastica* (Penguin Putnam, 1999).

Scott, Lesbia. *I Sing a Song of the Saints of God* (Morehouse, 2001).

Visconti, Guido. *Clare and Francis* (Eerdmans, 2004).

Wildsmith, Brian. *Mary* (Eerdmans, 2002).

_____. *St. Francis* (Eerdmans, 1996).

For educators and clergy:

Berryman, Jerome. *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7* (Morehouse Education Resources, 2008). This volume offers 12 stories on a variety of saints, including one in which the child can create a story and object box for themselves or a 'saint' that they know. Accompanying artifacts for all the stories. www.godlyplay.com

Cady, G. Scott and Christopher L. Webber. *A Year With American Saints* (Church Publishing, 2006).

Cornwell, Hilarie and James. *Saints, Signs & Symbols: The Symbolic Language of Christian Art*, Third Edition (Morehouse, 2009).

Earle, Mary C. and Sylvia Maddox. *Holy Companions: Spiritual Practices from the Celtic Saints* (Morehouse, 2004).

Finley, Kathy, Sylvia DeVillers, Rita Mailander, Kathy Coffey. *Growing Together: Six Intergenerational Celebrations, Volume 1: Fall & Winter* (Living the Good News, 1999).

Giles, Richard. *Times and Seasons: Creating Transformative Worship Throughout the Year* (Church Publishing, 2008).

Lesser Feasts & Fasts (Church Publishing, 2007).

Lucchese, K.M. *Folk Like Me: The Read-Aloud Book of Saints* (Morehouse, 2008).

Portaro, Sam. *Brightest and Best: A Companion to the Lesser Feasts and Fasts* (Cowley Publications, 2001).

Schlafer, David J. and Roger Alling. *Preaching Through Holy Days and Holidays* (Morehouse, 2003).

Wright, J. Robert, editor. *They Still Speak: Readings for the Lesser Feasts* (Church Publishing, 2003).

Wright, N.T. *For All Saints? Remembering the Christian Departed* (Morehouse, 2004).