

Pastor's Corner - October 30, 2011 - Halloween

The last few weeks the media have talked about Halloween; the stores have been full of items reflecting the enormous commercial holiday it has become. As a parish community we celebrate Halloween by asking the children to dress up (how about dressing up to resemble your favorite saint!) and come with their families to Oktoberfest on Nov. 4th. They carve funny faces into the pumpkins and prizes will be given out; a true community event enjoyed by all. Halloween is a more popular and more secularized feast than Easter! Yet, this feast has also a Christian foundation and can have positive messages for all of us.

Halloween comes from "hallow" or "holy" while "e'en" is a shortened form of "evening." So Halloween really means "all hallows eve," the evening before All Saints Day, November 1st. The first Christians gathered on anniversaries of a martyr's death to remember that person's witness to Christ (the Greek word "martyr" means "witness"). It was a celebration (not a mourning!) of a victory in order to inspire and encourage those who were being persecuted. It took a form that Christians knew best, that is by "the breaking of the bread (the Eucharist)," whereby all become united as "the Body of Christ." In the mid-fourth century a feast was added to remember all the unknown martyrs and eventually the feast was extended to include all Christian witnesses, all those who fully live the Gospel in their lives. In the year 835 this feast of All Saints was moved from May 13 to November 1 in order to Christianize the existing pagan feast for remembering the dead, to bring light to darkness, and hope to the most basic fears. Christians had also started to follow the Jewish custom of praying for the dead. By the 7th century monasteries were celebrating an annual mass for the deceased members of their Order. Around 1048 an abbot chose November 2 as the day to commemorate All Souls in order to complement All Saints on November 1. So both days are reminders that all of us, living and dead, are united in a living communion with Christ and with one another in order to form the Body of Christ. Halloween thus became the one vigil or evening before the Church's two important feast days that follow.

All Saints and All Souls are celebrated together so that we might not forget that we are called to look beyond the horizon of our earthly lives, beyond the limited horizon of this world. Saints define for us another world than the concrete marketable world of possessions, of pleasure, of power. That world is the communion of people where people are called "blessed," the blessings of the Beatitudes; we are connected with them, we are united with them, in communion with them. We call them Saints but these are not only the officially recognized ones. That is why we have this feast day of All Saints because they are all our loved ones who have died in peace, all those who point us to where our horizon lies, to where real glory lies and to which we too are called. All Souls is a feast that reminds us that, in the words of the Book of Wisdom 3:1-9: "The souls of the just are in the hand of God...they are in peace; ...the faithful shall abide with God in love because grace and mercy are with his holy ones." It reminds us that God's Spirit is in all; after all in the words of the Negro spiritual "He has got the whole world in his hands"

These feasts of All Saints and All Souls can be an opportunity to talk in our families, in our various groups like the CWL or the K of C or religious education, of our favorite saints, to talk about what is needed in today's world to be holy, what is needed in today's world to be a "martyr", a witness. It is also an occasion for us to talk about death as a part of life and part of a creation and a world that will pass away. And all of this we can do with joy and laughter, creative fun, stories, etc. because it is, after all, a victory celebration!!

SHALOM !

Fr. Rolf, OP