

# Christians and Halloween: Should Christians Celebrate Halloween?

By David Morrison

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In a little over a week it will be Halloween (technically Hallowe'en, but we have employed the popular spelling). Here in my corner of the Northwest (where the wintry dark and gloom come early and ANY reason to put up decorations is welcome) the strings of orange-colored lights have been up and shining since the end of September. In the evening almost every house has at least one Jack-o'-Lantern smiling out its snaggle toothed grin. And, of course, the department stores and costume shops are doing a lively business as the older folks get ready for autumn balls and dances and the little ones for a night of trick-or-treating.

Frankly, I like Halloween time. Not just the crisp autumn air and the gorgeous Gypsy quilt of fall colors as the trees turn, but I like the orange lights, the glowing pumpkin faces, the kids in their masks and costumes. And (I will readily admit) I do enjoy a good ghost story, a deliciously creepy tale told in front of a fireplace amidst a circle of friends on a chilly night. Having said that, I must also acknowledge that I also know the dangers of this time of year. Not just the physical dangers of Halloween pranks gone too far, or the dangers of tampered with treats given out by sick and perverse people, real as those are. I mean the real spiritual dangers of this season.



Most of the goings-on at Halloween time are, let's be real, just plain, harmless fun. I am no Puritan who would deny some frolic and silliness to well-meaning people, especially in these all too tense times of ours. There are other activities though that go on around Halloween that we who are Christians must be aware of...and wary of. In the past two decades there has been a resurgence of paganism and witchcraft in our culture, largely in response to the secularization of our nation. If people feel a spiritual void, they will fill it with something, and

the often colorful, folksy rites and accoutrements of popular witchcraft and paganism are very, very attractive. I will admit that I have, out of curiosity, walked into a so-called New Age shop and been quite fascinated. All the candles, the mystic paraphernalia, the lovely fragrance of incense, the various "oracles" one can buy, the intriguingly titled books, the jewelry and clothing all can be quite appealing to the senses. Used to find power apart from our Holy God, however, they can also be damning to our immortal souls.

I have noticed over the years that it's at Halloween time that many otherwise devout, God-fearing people will go to a seance, allow someone to read the Tarot for them, will dabble in a little "harmless white magic" (there is no such thing as "harmless magic" by the way), and otherwise play around with things forbidden by Scripture and the Church. And THAT is where the danger lies. The Powers of Darkness draw us in, not so much by great temptations, but by little enticements. "Oh, but that Tarot reading was just silly fun! (But, the reader did seem awfully accurate, didn't she?)", "I know we Christians don't believe in reincarnation...but that little past life regression game...well, it was so real!", "Oh, I don't really believe in these candle burning rituals, but the colored candles are so pretty and, well, they do help me feel better." And on and on. But doing these things...small and innocent as they may seem to us...not only open the door (even just a little) to Evil, they are sinful. I will quote a fairly long passage from the official Catechism of the Catholic Church.

All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the final analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe God alone...All practices of magic or sorcery...are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion (Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2116, 2117).

So, while it is perfectly legitimate to decorate one's house with orange lights and carved pumpkins, to dunk for apples and go to dances, to even indulge in a spooky tale or two, the Church warns us quite bluntly not to cross the line into the sin of witchcraft and sorcery and

tells us plainly what that includes. If we have crossed that line then we need to confess our sins to God and His Church and receive the assurance of pardon, grace, and restoration.

For those of us who are Catholics (or in a church that follows the Western liturgical calendar) we can have a truly Happy Halloween by keeping the festival as the Church originally intended. Halloween means "All Hallows' Eve," an old-fashioned way of saying, "The Eve of All Saints' Day." Originally the end of October and the beginning of November was the time when the pagan Celts celebrated the end of their year giving it the name Samhain (pronounced "Sah-win"). They believed that at that time the veil between this world and the next was very thin and that the dead came through to confront the living for good ... or evil. The Church, in order to counteract the pagan feast, introduced the Feast of All Saints, the day when all the triumphant dead in Christ would be commemorated and celebrated. No longer would the time be one of fear of death and the dead but one of "rejoicing with the Saints in Light".

The first thing we can do as Catholic Christians then is to tell people what Halloween is really about and witness to our faith in the "sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." We can tell others that as Christians "we believe in the Communion of Saints and the Life Everlasting," that those who have died in Christ are actually MORE alive than we, and pray with and for us. I know of one family that has an icon of "All the Saints," showing the "great cloud of witnesses." They put it outside their door on Halloween with a white candle burning before it. When the kids come trick-or-treating they explain what the icon is all about. Another person I know puts little tracts (along with goodies!) into the kids' bags.



Within our homes we can (and should) celebrate the day in our prayers, commemorating and thanking God for all the saints of every age...those known and those unknown...and unite our prayers to theirs in one great paeon of praise. The best thing we can do however is to go to Mass. The holy days and feasts are gifts of the Church to us, opportunities to unite with our brothers and sisters and celebrate our common Faith in Jesus Christ, to join with "angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven" in making Eucharist to the Lord of Hosts. The radiance from the votive candles we light there and from the light of faith in our hearts will far outshine in splendor the glow from all the strings of orange lights and Jack-o'-lanterns in the world.

We can also remember to keep the day after All Saints' Day. November 2nd is All Souls Day when we remember those who have died in Christ, whose final salvation is assured, but who are still undergoing the final sanctification of God's purifying Love. We can and should pray for our departed loved ones - grandparents, parents, beloved children, dear friends fallen asleep in the Lord - asking for them a final and full entrance into the Heavenly Kingdom and a full, clear view of the Divine Countenance.

So, do let's have fun. Autumn is a lovely time of year and indulging in the folk customs of our community can add some charm to our lives. But for a truly Happy Halloween, let's commemorate our brothers and sisters, the Saints in Light, and pray that we too may one day join them in that day where there is no darkness, but only the Radiance of Christ.

### ***Some Halloween Prayers:***

#### **A Prayer to be used on All Hallows' Eve**

O God, the King of saints, we praise and glorify your holy Name for all your servants who have finished their course in your faith and fear: for the blessed Virgin Mary; for the holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs; and for all your other righteous servants, known to us and unknown; and we pray that, encouraged by their examples, aided by their prayers, and strengthened by their fellowship, we also may be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 504.

### **A Prayer for All Soul's Day**

Remember, Lord, those who have died and have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, especially those for whom we now pray, N. and N. May these, and all who sleep in Christ, find in your presence light, happiness, and peace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.  
Canon of the Mass, Eucharistic Prayer I

### **For a departed loved one**

Almighty God, we remember this day before you your faithful servant N.; and we pray that, having opened to him the gates of larger life, you will receive him more and more into your joyful service, that, with all who have faithfully served you in the past, he may share in the eternal victory of Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

BCP, p. 202 adapted

### **Orthodox Troparion for All Saints' Day**

Throughout the world, Your Church, O Christ our God, is adorned with the blood of Your martyrs, as with purple and fine linen. Through them she cries to You: Send down Your pity upon Your people. To Your Church grant peace, and to our souls the Great Mercy. Amen.

### ***Article Photographs by David Bennett***

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