

Halloween

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I used to have a friend who was a 'born teacher' and a 'born nun'. She went about life quietly and unobtrusively but was always observant. She carried the mantle of Catholic faith throughout her life and was faithful to her vocation until the day she died. As things turned out, I went to visit her the day before she died and, true to form, she had something educational to say and to teach me. It struck me as appropriate that she died on All Saints' Day, 1 November.

The sacred three-day period in the Catholic liturgical calendar that ex-

tends from 31 October to 2 November is known as Hallowtide, or the Triduum of All Hallows. The word 'hallow' means holy. The triduum includes All Hallow's Eve (Halloween, 31 October), All Saints' Day (1 November) and All Souls' Day (2 November). These three days remind us of the communion between the Church Triumphant (the saints in heaven), the Church Suffering (the souls in purgatory) and the Church Militant (the faithful on earth).

Halloween was originally a vigil of preparation. The night invites Christians to contemplate the reality of

death, together with the triumph of good over evil. Across the world, many cultures celebrate Halloween with light-hearted customs and costumes. However, the roots of Halloween are deeply spiritual and constitute a reminder to prepare for the celebration of the saints, together with praying for the faithful departed.

All Saints' Day is a solemnity that honours all known and unknown saints, who now rejoice in heaven. The day celebrates the countless number of people who lived holy lives, thereby inspiring us to pursue our own vocations with love and courage. In many countries, All Saints' Day is a holy day of obligation.

All Souls' Day is a day that is devoted to remembrance and prayer for all the faithful departed undergoing purification in purgatory. In order to intercede for the souls of the faithful departed, Catholics offer Masses, prayers and visit cemeteries, trusting in the infinite mercy of God. These three days together constitute a powerful reflection on life, death and eternal hope. Hallowtide is a reminder that the living are united with the saints and souls and that we all live in the boundless love of Christ. It is a time when we are called to pray, to remember and to rejoice in God's promise of everlasting life.

There has always been a tradition of honouring martyrs in the Christian Church, as first exemplified in the beheading of St John the Baptist in the New Testament. After St John's death, his disciples respectfully buried him. A similar situation existed for St Stephen, who was given a Christian burial by his fellow Christians after he had been stoned to death. It is thought

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that the present date of All Saints' Day (Hallowmas) and therefore its vigil, Halloween, was established for Rome by Pope Gregory III (731–741). In 1430, Pope Sixtus IV established the octave of All Hallowtide lasting eight days for the whole Western Church, but the octave was subsequently eliminated as a result of the 1955 reforms of the Catholic Church.

One of the more secular traditions associated with Halloween is the notion of 'trick-or-treating'. Sometimes children call to their neighbours' houses and ask for money, apples, chocolate, sweets, cake or biscuits.

In Ireland, there was an ancient Celtic festival known as Samhain, which marked the end of the harvest and the beginning of winter. Traditions associated with this festival included lighting large communal bonfires, carving scary faces into turnips as lanterns, together with wearing costumes and masks to hide from wandering spirits. Ancient customs and beliefs included the belief that the boundary between the living world and the hereafter was thinnest on Halloween, permitting ancestors, spirits and fairies to cross over. Finally, a traditional food associated with Halloween is barmbrack, which is an Irish fruit loaf containing possibly a coin or ring in order to tell the finder's future concerning wealth and marriage.