



Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller

Founded in Jerusalem 1113, continuing through Czar Nicholas II
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Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum

NEWSLETTER FROM THE CHAPLAIN – NOVEMBER 1, 2019

The Very Reverend Canon Thomas J. Skindeleski, Prelate

We've just celebrated Halloween, a very old festival, that has its roots in pagan customs in Ireland before the coming of St. Patrick. The pagan Druid priests communicated with the souls of the dead on a particular evening around this time of year, when the days were growing shorter and the nights longer. When St. Patrick came on the scene, he did not abolish the Druidic, pagan custom altogether. Rather, he Christianized the custom by praying for the dead in connection with the hope of them joining the saints in heaven. He developed this custom to offset the Druidic ways and to connect with the saints in heaven.

Halloween means the *'eve of all Saints.'* The old English word for holy or saints is *'hallows or hallowed.'* as in "Hallowed be Thy Name;" and 'een' is a contraction for evening, or 'eve.' Since All Saints' Day falls on November 1st, Halloween was the hallowed or holy evening, which calls to mind the example of the holy ones who have gone to heaven. Eventually, the festival took on a new form with less emphasis on the fear of death and more on the hope for eternal life. Hence, Halloween: ***The Eve of All Saints.***

In time, the day set aside for praying for the dead was established by the Church as the day after All Saints' Day. So, the faithful now pray for the dead, not on October 31, but on November 2, the feast of All Souls. The ghouls and goblins that enter into the picture of observances represented (loosely) the attempts of the 'Evil One' to trick the souls to hell.

Over the years, the festival of Halloween as the eve of All Saints (like Mardi Gras, the day before Ash Wednesday), morphed into a secular holiday. It is celebrated today as a secular festival by children and adults alike. It has become the subject of scary Hollywood movies, and it is the 2nd largest commercial feast in America. More candy and costumes are sold on Halloween than any other day of the year.

While Halloween is celebrated as a day of fun and revelry like Mardi Gras, it is still important not to lose sight of its Christian origins. For those who have lost a loved one, now is a good time to remember them and to pray for them, especially on the Feast of All Souls on November 2. During this time of year, we're invited, if possible, to visit their graves.

We're all part of the great family of God, on earth and in heaven. This is what's meant by the *communion of saints*: the communion of the faithful in this world with those in the next. Remembering the souls of the faithful departed and praying for them is mentioned in the **Second book of Maccabees**, where it calls this action a 'holy and wholesome thought.' "It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins." (2 Maccabees, 12:46)

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