



Understanding the Celebration!!



October 31st / Halloween

Days were once counted from sunset to sunset, and so Christian feasts begin in the evening before the day that is marked on the calendar. The evening (or “eve”) of All Saints was called “All hallows evening.” “Hallows” means holy. “All hallows evening was shortened to “Hallowe’en.” The evening of October 31 begins our two-day remembrance of our ancestors and heroes of the faith.

Many Halloween customs were inherited from pre-Christian times, when people felt both respect for their ancestors and fear of death during the coming winter. After the harvest was collected and the days became short and dark, people made bonfires to welcome the spirits of the dead. The lights in jack-o-lanterns are the remains of this custom. The eerie faces carved in them are meant to scare away unfriendly spirits. Food offerings were left for the spirits, just as we give sweets to visiting trick-or-treat ghosts.

People once dressed up like their dead relatives or heroes to invite the spirits of those people to return and bless them. Today we sometimes dress as saints or heroes, and sometimes as ghosts or skeletons. The evening is a traditional time for singing, dancing, storytelling around the bonfires, and for enjoying delicious treats.

Christians know that those who have died share now in the resurrection of Christ. With and in Christ we all triumph over death. We use these days to remember our departed saints and to retell their stories. Our Halloween customs help us to laugh at the idea of ghosts and to celebrate with costumes, masks, and games our joy at being part of God’s holy people.





November 1st /All Saints

November, the time of harvest and the beginning of the earth's winter sleep, begins with a double feast in remembrance of those who have died. The saints, people already "harvested" into God's kingdom, are remembered on November 1, All Saints' Day... Each saint has something to teach about living as faithful Christians, and we rely on them to pray for us. We know that they will ask God to strengthen and protect us. This is a good time to learn more about our patron saints.

This day is a solemnity, the highest rank in the Church's order of celebrations, which means that Catholics participate in the Eucharist on this day if they can. These honours show us how important it is to be active members in the sacred exchange of love and support that exists between those who have died and those who are still living on this earth.

On the day of our Baptism the church used the Litany of the Saints, calling upon many saints by name, asking them to pray for us. We use it again to celebrate and honour them.

November 2nd /All Souls

This is the day we set aside to pray for all who have died, especially our family members and friends. All those who are baptized are members of the one Body of Christ, whether they are living or dead. Our love and work on earth can be a blessing for the living. We call the unity of love, concern, and prayer the "communion of saints."

In some places, families and parish groups go to the cemetery on November 2 with food, candles, and photos of the dead. They pull up the weeds, plant flowers, pray, picnic, sing, and tell stories late into the night. In Latin America, *El Dia de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead, is not gloomy or sad. It is a colourful, lively celebration of our belief that in death, life is changed but not ended.

Long ago in England, people went from door to door on this day and begged for "soul cakes." They sang a carol, "Soul, soul, soul cake! Please, good people, a soul cake! One for Peter, two for Paul, three for God who made us all." This may be the beginning of trick-or-treating.

All the elements that are used to celebrate this feast day show the strong faith of Christians that those who have died in Christ are raised with him and share in his glory.

***All Sections Taken from 'Blessings and Prayers through the Year' published by LTP*