

Halloween/All Saints/All Souls

The Church has always honored those who have died in the faith. In the early Church, the martyrs were especially remembered. The feast of All Saints began in the 4th century as the feast of All Martyrs and was originally celebrated the first Sunday after Pentecost, and then later on May 13th. Pope Gregory III changed the date to November 1st, and Pope Gregory IV established it as a feast for the entire Church.

The importance of this feast is seen by the fact that three days are actually spent in celebration. The evening before, now known as Halloween, was originally called All Hallows Eve, or the evening before the feast of All Saints.

Children can be encouraged to dress up as saints whom they admire. At school they can be invited to learn about the saint after whom they are named, or another saint that interests them. They can share that information in the classroom setting and conclude the celebration with a party. A party given at home can begin with invitations stating that the Halloween party is a celebration of the vigil of All Saints Day. If the children are to go out trick-or-treating, they can be sent out with a prayer of blessing.

On All Souls Day, the Book of the Names of the Dead is set up in a prominent place in the church building near the Paschal Candle. The blank pages are available for people to inscribe the names of deceased friends and relatives for whom they wish the parish to pray. At each Mass during the month of November, an intention for those listed in the book is included in the prayers of the faithful.

On All Saints Day or All Souls Day, during the prayers of the faithful, the names of all those who have been buried from the parish during the past year can be read. Or perhaps it could be done at the beginning of Mass so that those attending can have the deceased of the parish in mind throughout the liturgy.

In many cultures there are specific rituals which honor deceased members of the family. One of the celebrations in Asia is the "Feast of the Hungry Ghosts" where food is put out for the departed accompanied by incense. The Hispanic tradition of the "Day of the Dead" or "Dia de los Muertos" is being celebrated ever more widely in the United States. Usually a small altar is set up in the home or in the church building, including a Christian cross, pictures or statues of the Blessed Mother or other saints, along with pictures of deceased relatives and friends, and candles. People gather around this altar for prayer together. Usually there is food that is shared. It could be a full meal, or cookies. Sometimes there are candies in the shape of skulls, or a special bread, called "pan de muerto." These festivities celebrate the lives of the deceased, include them in the family and recognize death as a part of life.

Whichever tradition you choose to incorporate into your parish, include recognition of the deceased as members of our community who are experiencing life in a new way. Honor the dead with loving remembrance and joyful prayer.