

## Why Catholics Can Enjoy Halloween

Like many kids, I always looked forward to Halloween. I imagine this year with not as many perhaps out last year at this time at the height of the pandemic candy demand may be even higher.

However, have you ever run into folks who don't like Halloween, or perhaps think of it as some type of evil holiday? I did in high school.

High school was one of the first times that I was really exposed to people of other faiths. I remember the first week of school, an inter-faith Bible study group formed prior to school starting. Hearing this over the PA, I thought it would be great to join.

To be sure, there were some very good experiences in that group. But when faiths intermingle, even if we are all Christian in name, the reality is we are separated due to the consequences of history and effects of original sin between denominations in Christianity. As Catholics, we are part of the original Church and still have the guiding of the Church with Tradition with the capital "T" - something that is very helpful to help us grow in holiness and understand the faith which is being continually understood at a deeper level by the Church.

Among the issues that came up in this Bible Study club was Halloween. Specifically, there was a staff member at the school who was Assemblies of God. He hosted at his home an informal gathering for students with food, and it was about this time of year. I remember him remarking that his kids and family did not celebrate Halloween, associating it with the devil.

While it might be understandable one could make that link with all the horror movies and scary stuff this time of year, in reality, were I to go back or to have a conversation with him today and he had children who were of "trick or treating" age, I'd politely say for crying out loud man, let your kids enjoy this rite of childhood and do not overthink the day turning a day for stocking up on candy into something that it isn't.

The holiday's history is the eve of All Saints Day. It was known as a time for Christians to mock the devil by reveling in the triumph of Jesus Christ over evil and death. To borrow from the website "[catholic.com](http://catholic.com)" ***"That sound you now hear every October 31 is the devil mocking us. It seems some Christians, displaying a Grinch-ish dislike of the simple joys of dress-up and candy consumption, have literally demonized the traditional observation of Halloween as pagan—and worse...Many Christians through the centuries have entertained an unhealthy fear (as distinguished from a healthy fear) of the devil. Dressing children in "scary" costumes for the amusement of the neighbors can defang evil by demonstrating that innocence is adorable and evil is but a damned parasite on all that is good and noble. But in a hyper-scrupulous environment, it can be difficult for Christians to appreciate that there is spiritual value in such a mockery of evil—or even that it is mockery of evil and not participation in it."***

Looking at history a little more deeply, about the year 610, Pope Boniface IV dedicated the Roman Pantheon (still a lovely place to visit) to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to all Christian martyrs and set aside the day in their honor. The day coincided with a pagan Roman celebration to satisfy the restless dead. A century later, the day of All Saints was moved to November 1st. "All Hallows" eventually joined the stable of popular designations of time in the Church's calendar when the Church commemorates the saints.

Those of you who know Irish history might have heard of a link to the Celtic festival of *Samhain*, a feast for the Druid "lord of the dead" god. The Celts celebrated a time of the closeness of the natural and supernatural with fall ending and winter beginning. However there is no direct link that was intended by having the festival on the same date. And in Ireland, newly baptized Christians were not forbidden to build bonfires during the autumn months, or to carve gourds into lanterns, or to set out treats for the dearly departed. Realizing the missionary value of incorporating non-evil pagan folk practices into Christian customs, the Church allowed Christians to continue these old customs, seeing in them ways to pass on the faith.

Enter the Calvinists. If you want to ruin a party, invite a Calvinist. (There aren't that many around anymore, but John Calvin and his ideas led to even Christmas not being celebrated for a time in England). In the 17th century, all "popish" holidays were crushed when the Puritans ruled England and those areas in the American colonies where they settled. Christmas and Easter proved too important to the Christian liturgical year to be snuffed out permanently and were for the most part restored as Christian holy days. Halloween, on the other hand, never recovered. To this day, Christians from Fundamentalist Protestant to conservative Catholic remain locked in debate whether Halloween is a Christian holiday—and, if it is, to what extent Christians should celebrate it.

So the bottom line is Halloween is a day to enjoy, for children to get some candy, for parents, grandparents and neighbors to smile as the little ones come to the door, and to have a bit of fun, this year in particular. And remember, costumes of all kinds are fun, but saints are another option to dress up as at times. Irregardless, get to know the saints. They have so many great stories as they are just like us, and show us how to overcome sin and how to become spiritually great and are wonderful stories to share with kids too.

Have a great week, and happy Halloween.

God bless,

Fr. Paul