

Why I'm Glad to Be Bagging Candy

Like many kids, I always looked forward to Halloween. Putting on the costumes, going to various houses, and then seeing what you brought in dumping it all out on the living room floor. Good times.

This year will be the first since 2019 where I'll be finally getting back to the classrooms too along with Emmett. Typically I put various candy items or graham crackers and other treats in Ziplock bags, and make the rounds in the school with Emmett. We were closed in fall of 2020, and last fall we had a spike in Covid cases so didn't visit. But this year we're full speed ahead.

Sometimes though you might run into folks who don't like Halloween, or perhaps think of it as some type of evil holiday, typically of a fundamentalist/evangelical background. Some associate it with the devil or things that are evil. Really though it's our chance to mock the devil and death.

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" ***"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 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.

The anti-Halloween movement really comes from John Calvin, (a man so disliked by the locals they would shoot of a canon in front of his house hoping he'd leave town). 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, some Christians who are Fundamentalist Protestants continue 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 and be kids, for parents, grandparents and neighbors to smile as the little ones come to the door, and to have a bit of fun. 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 next Monday!

God bless,

Fr. Paul