

Lessons to be learned from Halloween, All Saints Day



I have a routine. Every year on Oct. 31 I go to the nearby drugstore and buy several bags of candy. Then, when I reach my home, I position a chair near the front door. Evening comes. I take my seat in the chair and wait.

Soon, the doorbell rings. Costumed children are on the doorstep when I open the door. I offer them candy. They take the candy and leave. I sit down again. Then, once more, the doorbell rings. I sit near the door because in my neighborhood there are many children, so I open the door to many spooks.

Throughout the evening, as every visitor comes and goes, I wonder how many of the children, or their parents, realize that they are repeating an old, old religious message.



Children pick out treats during a Halloween carnival in at Santa Cruz Catholic School in Tucson, Ariz. Halloween is the eve of All Saints

Day, Nov. 1. (CNS photo/Nancy Wiechec)

I suspect that not many know the origins of what they are doing, or repeating, just as few know the religious statements they make by placing a wreath of evergreens on their door at Christmas, or decorating the dining room table with an Easter bunny, a rabbit, at Easter.

To give the day its correct name, "Halloween" is All Hallows Eve, or the evening before All Saints Day, just as New Year's Eve is the night before New Year's Day.

Halloween is the first lesson in the two-part message given to us by All Saints Day. The Church celebrates Nov. 1 as All Saints Day. It is so important that the Church observes the day as a holy day of obligation, so that all Catholics can learn its lesson and celebrate what it says.

The Church provides a special liturgy within which we celebrate the most perfect of festivities, the holy Eucharist, the sacrifice of the Mass. This celebration occurs during daylight, with exceptions if needs arise. It is a joyful day, filled with thanksgiving and promise.

We rejoice in men and women, like ourselves, who have reached heaven because they loved the Lord. In heaven, they possess life and peace forever, in the very presence of God. They are all the saints.

Before reaching heaven, what did they leave behind? This is where the lesson of Halloween comes into play.

No young person goes on a "trick or treat" walk at high noon. It is supposed to be at night, although concern for the child's safety may change the schedule. Night is associated with darkness, cold and the unknown.

A major part of Halloween is the costume. The more

threatening, the better, so children appear as goblins and witches and vampires. In any case, they conceal their true identities. They may be quite friendly, as the children in my neighborhood always are, but Halloween is not about friendliness.

It is about greed, extortion and revenge. "Trick or treat."

The custom of Halloween has grown, and it has totally lost the meaning it was meant to convey. Life can be very dangerous and threatening. Meanness is all about. Death is real. It is about taking something, not about giving. No spook brings me candy.

It is about deceit, hence the costumes. The devil masquerades as the bearer of good things, and we all fall for it.

Everything is dark. In the dark, before uninvited costumed intruders, we are helpless. We surrender even our most precious treasures, the treasures of our soul, our holiness, rather than risk what is proposed to us as a punishment. Indeed, we are tricked.

Everything is cold. Life perishes in the cold. It thrives in warmth.

This is life. Face it.

The feast of All Saints has its lesson, and it completes the lesson begun on Halloween. Light, not darkness, surrounds us. We see everything clearly. No disguise bewilders us. We fear no danger, no threat. We are strong, not helpless.

We are safe in Christ, who repudiated the devil in the desert, who conquered sin on Calvary, and who triumphed over death in the Resurrection.

Msgr. Owen F. Campion is OSV's chaplain.