Pastor's Column
All Hallows' Eve, All Saints, and All Souls ~ October 29, 2017

This coming week, we have Halloween, All Saints Day, and All Souls Day. Halloween, or All Hallows' Eve, begins our commemoration of every hero of our Catholic Christian faith who has gone before us (that is, the Saints) and our follow-up commemoration of all of our faithful departed who have "gone before us with the sign of faith and rest in the sleep of peace," as we say in the first Eucharistic Prayer, from the Roman Canon.

Sadly, Halloween has become a very secular holiday that at a younger innocent age celebrates nothing more profound than loading up on cheap sugar and at an older high-school or college age can readily lead into a celebration of debauchery and even the demonic. Hopefully we can capture once again the original intent of this commemoration as one that celebrates the lives and prays for the souls of those who have lived and died before our time.

Regarding All Saints Day, the earliest certain observance of this feast in honor of all of the saints is an early 4th-Century commemoration of all of the *martyrs*. In the early 7th Century, after successive waves of invaders plundered the catacombs, Pope Boniface IV gathered up some thirty or so wagonloads of bones and reinterred them beneath the Pantheon, a Roman temple that was once dedicated to all the gods but which is now a Catholic shrine in the heart of Rome. According to St. Bede the Venerable, the pope intended "that the memory of all the saints might in the future be honored in the place which had formerly been dedicated to the worship not of gods but of demons." In time, when heroes of the Catholic Christian faith who were *not* martyred began to be venerated as saints, All Saints was expanded beyond the martyrs to include truly *all* saints.

Regarding All Souls Day, this is our Catholic Memorial Day, and it is a commemoration that ensures we the Church are committed to the Seventh Spiritual Work of Mercy: praying for the living *and for the dead*. The Church has encouraged prayer for the dead from the earliest times as an act of Christian charity. "If we had no care for the dead," St. Augustine said, "we would not be in the habit of praying for them." Yet pre-Christian rites for the deceased retained such a strong hold on the superstitious imagination that a liturgical commemoration was not observed until the early Middle Ages, when monastic communities began to mark an annual day of prayer for the departed members. In the middle of the 11th Century, Saint Odilo, abbot of Cluny, France, decreed that all Cluniac monasteries offer special prayers and sing the Office for the Dead on November 2, so as to follow immediately after the Solemnity of All Saints. The custom spread from Cluny and was finally adopted throughout the Roman Church.

The theological underpinning of the feast is the acknowledgment of human frailty. Since so few people achieve perfection in this life but, rather, go to the grave still scarred with traces of their sinfulness, some period of purification seems necessary before a soul comes face-to-face with God, which is Purgatory. The Council of Trent affirmed this Purgatory state and insisted that the prayers of the living can speed the process of purification. Sacred Scripture testifies to the goodness and the prudence of praying for the dead, particularly the Books of Maccabees in the Old Testament. It is a time of sorrow that we are parted from our beloved dead for a short time, but it is also a time of joy that the power of prayer and the glory of the resurrection conquers even death itself.

~ Fr. Lewis