

All Saints and All Souls

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost +

300,000 years ago an amazing event occurred in the area we now know as the Fertile Crescent. That's the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers that is understood to be the site of some of the most ancient human civilizations. A group of hominids were walking across a plain and one of their number died. It may have been old age, or attacked by a wild animal or the death could have occurred during a hunt. Why the person died is unimportant, what is important is that the group stopped what they were doing and buried the man that died.

Animals do not do this. When an animal dies in a group they continue to go about their normal activity. It is as if they do not even notice that their number has been reduced by one. But Man, that person created in the image of God, is not an animal. Man, fully aware of the environment around him, in that moment of time man also seems to have become aware of the eternal. And in recognizing the eternal he saw the promise of life continuing beyond the grave. There is no other explanation for why ancient man began to bury the dead in elaborate and costly rituals. We became aware that life continues when life in this place and time had ended.

On these two days we celebrate the Feasts of All Saints and the Commemoration of the All the Faithful Departed, All Souls. At the 10:00 Mass I will be preaching to the children about the importance of these two days in the Christian Calendar and their connection to the secular celebration of Halloween. It is important for all of us children to recognize the Divine Origin of all of our celebrations.

Christmas is a wonderful example to teach the children what I want them to understand. The celebrations of the Winter Solstice began long before God instituted the Covenant with Abram. People living in and with the natural order noted that there was a day when the cold of winter began to wane. A time when the sun appeared for a longer period and the intensity of the sunlight began to melt the ice and snow. Soon celebration began at the time when the sun returned to the earth with its full power and glory.

The celebrations became more elaborate and man began to consider what they were celebrating. (The return of life itself) The evergreen and the Holly Plant that seems to defy the cold by continuing to grow became symbols of this

season. Feasting, because soon the new crops would be planted and soon new foods would be available for the life and health of the people.

The rational mind says that the Church picked the winter solstice to celebrate the Nativity of Jesus. Doing so would stamp out the pagan celebration and firmly fix the Birth of Jesus in the people's minds. But what if that were not so? What if God long before the Birth of Jesus, in the Ordering of Creation fixed a time when people would begin to celebrate the return of the sun, the return of life and health.

When the pagan celebrated the return of the growing season in the ordering of creation they were not celebrating the Nativity of Jesus, but they were celebrating the Goodness of God who year by year gave them a season and a time to grow. Like the awareness given to those ancient hominids, perhaps God was giving this wisdom. The Nativity of Jesus is the celebrating of the return of the Son. Return I say, because it is in the Gospel of John that we are reminded that He was in the beginning and nothing was made but through Him.

And so it was with the ancient celebration of Samhain (SOW-EN) in the British Isle. In Mexico and Latin America it is *El Día de los Muertos* the Day of the Dead. In nearly every country there are similar celebrations; a thanksgiving for the Harvest of the fruits of the earth and a time to remember those who belong to God's Harvest. Saints and those whom we love but see no longer are remembered on these days.

As for the traditions they vary from country to country, but there are some common elements. The gathering of the family is most important. As we the church gathers, so to in many places people gather to remember their beloved dead. They remember those who have lived extraordinary lives, those whom we call Saints and they remember all those who have lived and loved and died in the peace of Christ.

The traditions of All Hallows Eve which is the real name for halloween, include the wearing of costumes. These costumes were first to symbolize a connection with the dead and later became a connection for the living to a Saint. The gourds we hollow out and make into scary faces were the lanterns left in the grave yard to mark the way for those who wished to visit the grave of a friend or relative. The treats come from the poor bread offered to beggars. A small

loaf made with the sign of the cross impressed upon it. The beggar was given this food and asked to offer a prayer for the dead.

The parties, the elaborate costumes and all the ghost and monsters of last night are the invention of fiction writers and the commercial zeal of our country. It is important for us to have days of fun and evening when we can dress up and play “make believe”. It is part of being human.

But as we do so we should also be reminded of what really makes us human. What makes us human is the awareness of God. The God who is our Father and loves us in this place and time and when we die loves us into eternal life.

On the Feast of All Saints we remember those whose lives have been conformed by God’s Grace and their diligence in prayer. Their lives become living examples of the Beatitudes that Jesus taught.

On the Feast of All Souls we remember all of our beloved dead. We remember them and pray that they may continue to grow in their love and service. We give thanks that they and we will someday stand before the Throne of Grace in that place where there is no pain or suffering but light and life eternal.

AMEN