

## CHILDREN'S HOMILY ABOUT HALLOWEEN

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I want to talk with you this morning about a holiday that's all about love, and family togetherness, and a sense of community. Can you guess what it is? (Halloween)

What do you usually think Halloween is all about? (Scary things; costumes; trick or treating; death)

What do you think the word "Halloween" means? (Hallow Eve, or All Hallows Eve -- the evening before All Hallows Day or All Saints Day, which has been a Christian holiday for more than a thousand years. And the next day, called All Souls' Day, has been a Christian holiday for just under a thousand years.<sup>1</sup>)

What are All Hallows' Day and All Souls' Day all about? (Honoring the dead -- all the saints of the church on All Saints' Day or All Hallows' Day, and everyone who has died on All Soul's Day<sup>2</sup>).

So Halloween or All Hallow's Eve for a very long time in the Christian Church has been an evening vigil or time of watching and waiting for these two holy days that follow and that honor great people and relatives and friends who have died and are no longer with us. This is where all those feelings of love, and family togetherness, and sense of community come in. Christians see death not as a scary time of ending and separation, but as a time of passage from life in this world to eternal life with God. Those of us who are still alive on this earth then take special time during these two days to remember our loved ones who have died. We think about them and talk about them and appreciate them.

That way there doesn't seem to be a great line drawn between life and death, but a natural movement from one to the other and to a new birth into everlasting life. It's a little like the seasons of the year. It's now fall! 1, and all around this country crops are being harvested -- the Halloween pumpkin is a great symbol of the harvest. Things seem to be dying, and not much grows during the winter in most of the northern part of America, but then the spring comes and everything comes to life again. The summer follows, and then the fall again, and life and death and life and death follow naturally in a big cycle.

Part of that cycle in the life of the church is what we're doing today in performing our sacrament of baptism. Many of the people being baptized have only recently been born, and all who are baptized today are being welcomed into the family of the Christian Church. They remain in that family as they grow older and then on All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day we remember them as still part of that family even after they have died.

Do any of you have any relatives or close friends who have died? Do you do anything to remember them? (Photographs, things that belonged to them in your house, keeping letters they wrote, etc.)

My four grandparents died at very different times -- my father's father before I was born, his mother when I was in college, my mother's father after I became a minister, and

my mother's mother just last year. I keep pictures of all of them in my house, I have furniture and personal items of theirs, and I cherish letters they wrote).

So, remembering the dead in this way isn't scary, but it's full of love, and family togetherness, and sense of community. We may be a little sad at first in remembering those who died, but soon we can find ourselves happy too in remembering all the joy they brought. As Jesus said in this morning's Gospel Lesson: "Blessed are you who weep now; you will laugh."<sup>3</sup> I hope you'll remember that in the future when you celebrate Halloween. It's real meaning is that it's the evening before All Hallows' Day—All Saint's Day' and the honoring of our beloved dead.

One of the best reminders of this, perhaps, is to stay in touch with people of Spanish or Latin American heritage who celebrate los dias de los muertos -- the Days of the Dead. This is a time of feasting and celebration that begins with Halloween and extends through All Saints Day and All Souls Day. The Days of the Dead aren't scary, as one author explains: "They provide the opportunity for a warm family and neighborly reunion which includes the well-remembered deceased along with the living. The dead are considered to be part of the family, especially on this day."<sup>4</sup>

I want to read you a little bit now from a children's book called Maria Molina and the Days of the Dead:<sup>5</sup>

"When I woke up from my nap, I was in the graveyard. But I was not scared. Almost my whole family was there with me. Everyone except my abuela, my grandmother, and Pablo, my baby brother. They were buried here... It was Pablo we were honoring that night. My Brother died when he was just a few months old, not big enough to do anything besides laugh and cry and play with a few toys.

"We will honor his spirit on the first of Los Dias de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead,' my mother told me all year... If I lived in the United States, I, Maria Molina, would not be in a graveyard tonight. I would be out trick-or-treating on Halloween....

"We sat there til morning, surrounded by the sweet smell of incense, talking softly and remembering Pablo.

"The next day was the second of the Days of the Dead. 'Today we honor our ancestors,' my mother reminded me. 'Your abuela....I helped my mother prepare grandmother's favorite foods -- tortillas with blue corn, tamales wrapped in banana leaves, and mole -- a chicken in a sauce of chocolate and chiles...

"As the darkness fell, we [went back to the graveyard,] lit candles, and began keeping vigil. My father told me what to say. 'We miss you, abuela,' I said softly. 'We have brought our offerings. Come and be pleased to receive the soul of what the land has given us.'... I fell asleep for a while, and when I awoke the fiesta had begun... Just as the day had sparkled with colored ribbons, tissue-paper decorations, bright flowers, now the night sparkled with black-and-yellow candles and fireworks. Laughing faces loomed all around. People visited, prayed, gossiped -- like a big family reunion.

[Later Maria Molina and her family moved to the United States. They could no longer be with Pablo and abuela at their graves, but they still honored them:] "In our apartment, we set up a small ofrenda, or altar. On it we placed the photograph of my grandmother, my brother's favorite toys, and a bowl of marigolds. My mother baked her own Pan de los Muertos [bread of the dead], and this went on the altar too. All night we kept vigil. Before I fell asleep, I looked all around at my family. And it was magic, the most magic thing of all."

May each of you be able to celebrate the Days of the Dead -- Halloween and All Saints Day and All Souls Day -- throughout your lives, wherever you are, with laughing faces all around, like a big family reunion. And may you find it to be the most magic thing of all.

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<sup>1</sup> Russell W. Belk, "Carnival, Control, and Corporate Culture in Contemporary Halloween Celebrations," in Jack Santino (ed.), Halloween and other Festivals of Death and Life (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> The New Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), Vol. I, pp. 318-319.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 6: 21.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Strupp Green, Laughing Souls: The Days of the Dead in Oaxaca, Mexico (Balboa Park, CA: San Diego Museum of Man, 1969), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen Krull, Maria Molina and the Days of the Dead (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1994).