



31st Week of Ordinary Time and All Saints: 30th October/1st November

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The fullness of joy in your presence, O Lord” (Psalm 15)

Halloween, the Pagan Festival of Horrors, Fear and Death is age old: Encyclopedia Britannica has this description: “In ancient Britain and Ireland, the Celtic Festival of Samhain was observed on October 31, at the end of summer.... The souls of the dead were supposed to revisit their homes on this day and the autumnal festival acquired sinister significance, with ghosts, witches, goblins, black cats, fairies and demons of all kinds said to be roaming about. It was the time to placate the supernatural powers controlling the processes of nature. In addition, Halloween was thought to be the most favourable time for divinations concerning marriage, luck, health, and death. It was the only day on which the help of the devil was invoked for such purposes.” (See Fr. Shafiq Abouzayd document)

Father Shafiq, the Melkite Chaplain, based in London, writes “Now, to understand Halloween better we must go even further back. I found that the original celebration was not called by its present name, Halloween. But, it began long before Christ among the ancient Celtic peoples (Britons, Gauls, Scots, Irish). They observed the end of summer with sacrifices to SAMAN (Shamhain). He was “the lord of death and evil spirits”. This marked the beginning of the Celtic New Year. Historically, Halloween is obviously and totally a pagan, occultic worship day. There is nothing Christian about the day.”

I have always felt uneasy about the celebration, and it goes back to childhood when my parents told us to steer clear of it. So, when I see it fast approaching with buses carrying adverts for a new film “Prey”, a scary type of movie for home viewing I would think! And pumpkins awash in supermarkets ready for carving with frightening faces – I wonder do we Christians just walk into all of this as purely “fun” without considering what we are becoming part of: “Halloween is harmful because it lures people into the Occult,” says Father Shafiq, and “many children are introduced to Occultic practices at Halloween Parties.”

What does the Church say about it? Pope Francis warns the “wearing of skeleton suits, dressing up as vampires, witches or goblins or slapping on fake blood is not far removed from communing with the Devil” (Catholic Online). And, Pope Benedict spoke out in 2009 against the fall celebrations calling them “anti-Christian and dangerous” (L’Osservatore Romano 30 Oct 2009).

Father Shafiq quotes a Pastor Jamie Morgan, from Williamstown, New Jersey, who writes: “God is a God of life, but Halloween focuses on death. Should I celebrate a holiday where people decorate their front yards with tombstones...Halloween is the sacred, high holiday for Wiccans (the official religion of witchcraft). Is this a holiday Christians should celebrate alongside Wiccans?” ... “Is it cute when we dress our kids

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



like the devil (or witches, ghouls, scary characters. Etc)? Isn't it, well, demonic?... The Lord said in 2 Cor 6:17 'come out from them and be separate... touch no unclean thing' ... Doesn't God want His children to be set apart from the world and from sin and evil?' ... my extended family think its ridiculous that we do not allow our son to dress up for Halloween. Should their opinion matter to me more than God's?"

In his reflection for the Gospel for the 31st Sunday, Father Brendan McGuire turns to a favorite poem of mine "The Hound of Heaven" by Francis Thompson. He says he loves it because he personally genuinely tried to flee the Lord's call for many years. The poem goes like this:

"I fled him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled him, down the arches of the years;
I fled him, down the labyrinthine ways
of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from him... - a voice beat I hear
more instant than the feet -
'All things that betray thee, who betrayest me'"

It is a beautiful poem about how we search for God whilst also fleeing from Him.

In the Gospel Zacchaeus is searching for Jesus when he climbs the tree, but M'Bride points to the last words of the Gospel passage to unlock its meaning: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost." He says it is "more about God searching for Zacchaeus than Zacchaeus searching for Jesus."

Like Zacchaeus (a chief tax collector, with ill-gotten gains) we search for God in all sorts of ways and places. Maybe we seek him in being a likeable parent to the point of ignoring the reality of customs we introduce our children to; or being a good friend to the point of ignoring the injustice of gossip or malice; or we are ready to do anything to rise up the corporate ladder.

M'Bride says "whenever we are ready to turn back to God, we will realise that God is as close to us as our shadow...God wants us to realise he is always there, ready to forgive and welcome us home."

Halloween, the eve of All Hallows, All Saints Day, is a good time to remember our calling. Fr Ferlita in his commentary recalls St John writes in his first letter: "God sent His Son into the world that we have may have life through Him" that we might become through him God's sons and daughters (I John 4). In the second reading for All Saints, St John writes "see what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called children of God" (1 John 3). That is what we proclaim when we celebrate our children's Baptism. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as we give thanks for that moment and pray for those who passed on the Faith to us when we pray for them on the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (All Souls) and visit their graves to pray, as is the tradition in November.

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