

Reflection for Saturday 31 October

ALL HALLOWS' EVE or HALLOE'EN!

When I was an Anglican parish priest of Brigstock together with three other villages in Northamptonshire I was asked to judge the best costume at a Hallowe'en party for children in the village Hall. I declined, saying that I did not approve of Hallowe'en. I thought to myself, was I being a killjoy not entering into the fun of the children dressing up as witches, imps, goblins and devils? It was only a bit of fun. But was it? I made my point.

As Christians can we really support Hallowe'en? Those characters are representatives of evil. Should we be encouraging children to trivialize evil? Every time we watch the local news on TV there's a report of yet another stabbing or shooting in the Birmingham area. Then there's those heart-rending pictures of wounded children lying on hospital beds in Syria and the Yemen after yet another bomb attack on a civilian area and families crying after their homes have been destroyed and loved ones have been killed or gone missing. We are confronted by evil all the time. We cannot make fun of it. We can only pray that God will turn the hearts of those who think that killing and destruction are the answer to theirs and the world's problems.

I say yes to All Hallows' Eve. Hallows is an old English word for saints. There are a number of medieval churches dedicated to All Hallows in this country. Hallowe'en was the old name for All Hallows' Eve. Why did it ever become associated with evil spirits? Let's keep the real eve of All Saints. In fact the Christian festival is the exact opposite to Hallowe'en. This evening we shall be celebrating the many saints, known and unknown, who are in heaven and are shining examples to us of how to live the Christian life. We rejoice with them that we shall be with them in God's time. We shall be hearing more about the solemnity of All Saints tomorrow.

Although celebrations will be somewhat muted because of Covid-19, including Hallowe'en, we look forward to when we can make something of All Hallows' Eve by having a party after the evening Mass, and asking our children to dress up as one of the saints. Perhaps next year that might be possible. But now on this eve of All Hallows let's celebrate the goodness of God in the lives of those who have helped us on our Christian journey and are praying for us.

By the way I used to join in the fun of the village about a week later after Hallowe'en, when every year on Bonfire Night my wife and I used to judge the best dressed guy, which was then put on top of the fire before it was lit.

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