



## ASK THE DEACON

### A NOTE from DEACON GREG

Whether you are a parent, a teacher or a student—an adult or a child, we can be faced with questions that are hard to answer. “Ask the Deacon”, is to help answer questions about our faith. Do you have a question about our faith that you would like Deacon Greg to answer? Please submit them by email to [gmillar@stjosephwaconia.org](mailto:gmillar@stjosephwaconia.org)!



Deacon Greg Miller

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#### Q: I HEAR THAT HALLOWEEN IS ACTUALLY A RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY. IS THIS TRUE?

**A:** The name Halloween means The Eve of All Hallows. You might recognize the word hallow from the Lord’s Prayer when we pray, “Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.” Or we could say, “Holy be thy name,” because the word hallow means holy. So the name we have given to the holiday that we celebrate as Halloween actually means the Eve of All Holies, or of All the Holy Ones. By now, you may have figured out that we celebrate Halloween on the day before All Saints Day because that is exactly what we are really celebrating, the feast of all those holy people who are in heaven but have not been officially declared saints by the Church. Most people who have died and gone to heaven have never been declared saints by the Church, nor will they be. Part of the reason is that there are just too many of them and there is not enough time here on earth for the Church to look into the lives of every single living soul. Another part of the reason is that many people have lived and died who are not readily known by the Church authorities, but one thing we can count on is that Jesus knows them. So the Feast of All Hallows, or All Saints as we call it today here in America, is a very special day set aside to honor those unknown saints, and the known saints too, and to ask them to pray for us as we journey through life toward becoming saints ourselves.

The day after All Saints Day is also a special day. It is called All Souls’ Day. On all Souls’ Day, we honor and pray for all people who have died whether they went to heaven or not. The reason is

simply that we just do not know. What we do know is that we are told that there is a place called Purgatory which is where souls go to be purified and made ready for heaven. In other words, some people are not quite ready to go straight to heaven when they die, so God, in his Divine Mercy, allows them to become purified in Purgatory to prepare them for Heaven. The name Purgatory comes from the root word “purge” which means exactly what it sounds like, that the person’s soul may be purged of any impurities that are preventing it from enjoying the blessings of Heaven. It is important for us to pray for the souls in Purgatory, for our prayers for them, help them get to Heaven more quickly.

So two things we need to know about All Saints Day and All Souls’ Day is that All Saints Day is a Holy Day of Obligation which means that all Catholics are required to attend Mass on All Saints Day to honor and celebrate the lives of all the Saints in Heaven. All Souls’ Day, on the other hand, is not a Holy Day of Obligation, but it is still good to go to Mass to pray for all the souls in Purgatory. In our parish, we have a special Mass on All Souls’ Day in the evening where we honor and pray for all those who died during the past year.

So, back to Halloween. Why do we celebrate with costumes and candy and trick or treating? The holiday, as we know it today, is a blend of ancient traditions stemming back as far as 2,000 years. In Ireland, and Northern France people would build bonfires as part of their celebration of harvest time as the darkness of night occurred earlier in the evening. It helped to drive away the fear of darkness and allowed them to continue their harvesting work. In modern times the tradition of “trick or treating” became popular in the United States as a community celebration. Halloween parties and going door to door asking for candy helped to bring communities closer together. The tradition of pumpkins goes back to the days before electricity. Pumpkins and turnips were easily used as lanterns to provide light. The carving of pumpkins has since become somewhat competitive. Who can make the scariest or coolest-looking pumpkin? How about you?