

All Souls' Day

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All Souls' Day, St. John's, Halifax Street

On November the 1st. the Church celebrates saints with a capital ESS, like John, Paul, Mary, Elizabeth, Francis, and so on. The evening before is called Hallows' Eve, which is abbreviated to Halloween. There is no Christian significance to that. However, it is the last day of the primitive Celtic calendar, and for them is the night of all witches, for which Celts invented rituals to protect themselves from the power of evil. It was called Samhain, (pronounced SAH-win). It was a time to welcome the harvests at the end of summer, and to light bonfires and wear costumes to scare off ghosts. It was generally believed to be the night when the doors between the worlds of the living and the dead swung open, and re-location could take place. The present Halloween activities have nothing to do with Christianity, and if you take part in them, then you are opening yourself to powers of evil, over which you have no control. If something odd and unsettling happens, remember that you were warned! So then, back to our Christian celebration.

On the next day, November the 2nd, Christians celebrate saints with a lower case ess, that is, all the members of the church who have passed on – like my mother and father, and younger brother, Jim. Over time, the two festivals became intermingled, but both are a thanksgiving for the future life in Christ.

When we die we pass into Paradise, as Jesus explained to the dying thief, crucified with Him on Calvary. "Today you will be with me in Paradise".(Lk 23:43) Later, after His resurrection, Jesus appears to Mary in the Garden of Gethsemane. and says, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father Go

instead to my brothers and tell them , 'I am returning to my Father, and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (Jn 20:17) So then, it appears that all of us – Jesus, faithful Believers, and non-believers – go to Paradise. We do not know why Jesus would go to Paradise, but it might be to preach the good news to those who have never heard, or had it imperfectly preached to them, or to those who have rejected Him. (1 Peter 3:18-19, Jn 5:25)

But why should we, who are justified and saved and forgiven, go to a place of waiting before actually going to heaven? No one, however good a life they may have lived on earth is fitted at once to come into the glorious Presence of God. There are stains and imperfections still clinging to the souls of the very best people which must be purged and done away with, before the full sight of God can be endured, and His presence be enjoyed. For the saved, the intermediate state is as a preparation for the life of Heaven.

From Scripture, there appears to be two judgments – the First and the Last or General), both taking place in Paradise, where there is a foretaste of the things to come. For the saved , there is a taste of the Presence of God, and for the unsaved, a taste of the absence of God. We find this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Lk 16: 19 ff, where Jesus is describing the state of two souls in the interval between death and judgment. That He is not speaking of heaven or hell is evident. The Greek word translated "hell" in the sentence "and in hell he lifted up his eyes", is "hades," and is never used in Holy Scripture for the place of everlasting punishment. If this is a little difficult to fully comprehend, then let me tell you the good news.

Imagine a big round balloon. Inside are two smaller balloons. One is the church on earth, the other is the church in paradise. They are separated by the narrow stream of Death, but they are spiritually in touch with each other, because they are bathed in the Spirit of God. Together they make up

the whole Church, and there is a spiritual unity between them. It is no wonder, then, that we on earth sometimes feel the presence of a loved one who has passed away, because we are one in the Spirit. That feeling is real, because we are united brothers and sisters through the grace of God.

Unfortunately, there appear to be some souls which are not at rest, for reasons we do not know, and for them we offer the age-old prayer of the Church:- **Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. May they rest in peace, and rise in glory!**