

FRIENDLY GHOSTS

The last time that I went to the barbershop for a haircut, I was asked what I thought about Halloween. My response was, "Have fun." Most consider Halloween a time for kids to dress up, pretend they are someone they are not, and ask for treats from the neighbors. Some like to think of it as a night to scare and trick people, going overboard at times. Still others look at Halloween as being related to the Devil.

Actually, the word itself comes from the term "All Hallow's Evening." That refers to the night before two Roman Catholic liturgical days of prayer for those who have preceded us in the earthly journey. In a few days, our Church will be observing those two days. They are All Saints Day and All Souls Day. We of the Assembly of Believers recognize the continuing existence of our souls into eternity. Therefore, we rejoice in the victory obtained by those who successfully completed their journey and pray for those who are still struggling to do so. These latter, we have considered being in a place called Purgatory.

Pope John Paul II clarified what was always indicated but wrongly interpreted by western, legal minds as a place of temporary punishment. He said that purification after death (Purgatory) is not a place but a condition of existence. Eastern theology has considered such a state after earthly death as a growth and maturation of the soul yet imperfect, rather than punishment. Is it not possible, then, that ghosts are real? They could be the souls (or spirits) of those still in need of some type of purification relative to their earthly life, which has ended. Frequently, they need our assistance. On Halloween, we imitate this by dressing up in costumes and asking our neighbors for treats.

As for All Saints Day, our Church claims numerous holy men and women who have risen to give witness to the Lord in their particular day and place. They have no need to come around and ask for our help. Nor do they scare us. Although, at times, they are allowed to appear to specific individuals. However, that is not for their benefit, but for ours. Our Basilica of Saint Michael the Archangel has a wonderful tradition. On certain days during this season, a number of individuals dress up as certain saints, stationing themselves at various points in the area and telling their stories to visitors.

Of course, the word "ghost" means "spirit," as in "Holy Ghost" or "Holy Spirit," the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. Consequently, we should have no need to fear ghosts. The exception would be Satan and his devils. They, too, are spirits and are the truly scary ones. (These, too, are imitated on Halloween.) Distinguishing the good spirits from the bad is an art. As for those that Satan has already won to its side, they are not allowed to come around.

So, when the goblins come to your door on Halloween, give them a treat. If a spirit ever visits you, realize that it may be trying to get your attention. Try to figure out what it might want you to do so that it can be freed. It could be as simple as a prayer. In all of this, we are in the company of friendly ghosts. On All Saints Day, we have an opportunity to rejoice in the victory that we pray will one day be ours, as well.