



## CELEBRATING LIVES WELL LIVED

A lumbering caterpillar morphing into a graceful butterfly is a dramatic and delightful change. A holiday honoring saints that morphs into a showcase for death and horror is also a dramatic change, but not so delightful. That holiday is Halloween, enthusiastically celebrated by many, ignored or shunned by others.

In the United States, a staggering \$12.2 billion was spent last year on Halloween costumes, candy, and decorations, according to one shopping research company. That translates to more than \$100 per household, and rising every year.

Dressing up as Spiderman or a pumpkin and binging on Snickers bars is the happy part of “Happy Halloween!”; evil pranks and satanic devotion are the very dark side of this night. With ghosts, skeletons, and other spooky symbols of death everywhere, it is a far cry from Halloween’s beginnings as All Hallows Eve. Yet that, too, had connections to death.

Originally, All Hallows Eve was a Christian religious vigil on the eve of All Hallows Day, now known as All Saints Day and celebrated on November 1. Ever since the Middle Ages, the focus of both All Saints Day and its vigil has been saints, specifically those saints no longer with us. It is one thing to honor the living, who exercise active faith in the here and now. But why honor the dead?

To be clear, honoring the dead is not the same as praying to them. When we honor saints gone by, we salute their courage, faithfulness, compassion, and other traits that exuded their identity in Christ. These saints include biblical figures, martyrs, canonized Saints, unrecognized saints, and people who lived out their Christian faith in quiet and ordinary ways. A saint is not to be understood as a perfect and pious person, but as a grateful sinner saved by grace, who lives accordingly.

The Bible gives us grounds to honor saints, especially in the chapter often called “The Hall of Faith”, found in the New Testament (Hebrews 11). There we find a long list of men and women, drawn from earlier Bible history all the way back to Genesis, who are cited for their faith and the way they lived it out.

For example, by faith, Noah built the ark before a drop of rain fell. By faith, Abraham set out with his family for an unknown destination and future. By faith, Moses’ parents hid him as an infant, because “they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict” that all infant Hebrew boys must be killed. By faith, that same Moses later led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. All of these famous, faith-filled saints deserve honor.

And so do the others mentioned in the same chapter, those who “conquered kingdoms, administered justice...shut the mouths of lions...were put in chains and imprisoned...were stoned...went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated”, and more.

Their stories are all over the map, literally and figuratively. Like us, they were all flawed, yet they were used by God and saved by faith in Him. They now constitute the “great cloud of witnesses” that surrounds us, unseen but alive today in Christ and inspiring us to run life’s race with faith and endurance, unencumbered by sin (Hebrews 12:1).

So we honor them, on All Saints Day and otherwise, for their faith in God and how it shaped their lives. You can probably name people from your own life, living or dead, whose active faith influences you today. This is a good time to honor them.

May their lives remind us, even as images of death abound in the macabre trappings of Halloween, and thoughts of our own mortality come to mind, that we need not fear the Grim Reaper and other fictitious ghouls.

Jesus Christ has conquered death, once for all, by his own death on the cross (Romans 6:8-10). So for all the saints in every age who put their trust in Him, there is the assurance of abundant life, both now and forever (John 10:10; Romans 14:8; 1 John 4:4).

With love in the Lord,  
The Rev. Christine Maddux