



## Thoughts from Marie Walton, Pastoral Associate for Children, Youth & Family Faith Formation

**All Hallowstide** In our Roman Catholic faith we celebrate several holy days. For over a thousand years many Christian people have celebrated the autumn festival of All Saints Day on **November 1st**. The festival begins the night before on Halloween and continues through **November 2nd**, which is All Souls Day or The Day of the Dead. Halloween means "Hallows Eve". Hallows is another word for saints. Together these days were once called Hallowmas or All Hallowstide.

On Halloween night we begin the church's month to remember the dead. What some consider a pagan holiday is really the beginning of our way of remembering those who have preceded us in death in a special way. People all over the world hold harvest festivals. On the evening of **October 31st** we Christians hold a harvest festival, a festival of ancestors. We see in the familiar custom of trick or treat evidence of Christian faith through hospitality, playfulness, generosity and a healthy remembrance of the dead in anticipation of our joining them one day in heaven.

On All Saints Day we celebrate the "communion of saints" that we express belief in when we say The Apostle's Creed. We believe in the spiritual solidarity that brings together the faithful on earth and the saints in heaven. We honor those men and women, canonized or not, who have led lives of faith as an example to all Christians. Saints believe that God is on their side and don't hold back from doing good things. They don't wait for someone else to act first. They operate out of love before all else and help us to see that it's not what we earn or own but that love is the most important thing in the world. When I think of the communion of saints I always remember the image described in a homily many years ago. When we are in our places at church we can imagine the assembly as half of a circle. The other half of the circle is filled with our loved ones who have gone before us and join us in the celebration of the Eucharist.

On All Souls Day and throughout the month of November we recall our deceased relatives and friends and all the faithful departed. An old custom on All Souls Day was to make "soul cakes". Similar to a donut they were circular in shape. They were given away as a kind of prayer for loved ones who had

died. The circular shape is a symbol of heaven where the beginnings and endings of things will run into each other - the communion of saints!

In some towns people would "go a-souling" promising prayers for each soul cake they received. This could have been the beginning of our custom of trick or treat. In the Hispanic tradition it is common to have a Day of the Dead or Dia de los Muertos Altar. We are blessed to have a Day of the Dead altar in our vestibule. Our sister parish, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, in Oakland has provided this for us.

Our parish All Saints Day Masses are on **November 1st** at 8:30am and 12:00 noon and All Souls Day Masses are on **November 2nd** at 8:30am and 7:00pm. The 7:00pm Mass on **November 2nd** will be a special Mass to pray for and remember our relatives and friends who have died. You are invited to bring a picture of your deceased loved ones. There will also be cards to fill out with your loved ones names to be read at Mass. A reception will follow in Mullen Commons.

This year the celebration of these days has taken on new meaning for my family. In August our granddaughter Tessa died just three days after her birth. As we struggle to make sense of her death we have found so much meaning in her short life on Earth. We have learned that each life whether it lasts a few days or a hundred years makes an impact on us. Each life has a purpose and provides us with opportunities to love. We have felt surrounded by love from family, friends and even people we have never met who share in our grief. Knowing that the St. John Vianney community continues to pray for us has been an incredible comfort. Tessa's picture will join the pictures of our loved ones that have recently died that are displayed in the vestibule during the month of November.

Halloween, All Saints and All Souls are together a festival of the dead. We remember with love those who have gone before us. We dare to imagine what waits for us on the other side of the grave. Death is terrifying yet we make fun of it with skeletons and ghosts. In Jesus we will have the last laugh, even over death.

