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Plans for Halloween?

Many long years ago, we remember the childhood fun of anticipating Halloween. Weeks before the day arrived we quizzed our friends about what they would wear for the big night, as we gave careful consideration to our own options and badgered our mothers for the best costumes possible. Was this to be the year we were Superman? A ghost? A faerie? A ballerina? A cowboy?

As the day approached we begged for rights to stay out later, and roam farther, in our mad frenzy to collect massive quantities of sugar-laden candy and treats. There was, of course, even those long years ago, the concern for what mischief might be afoot on that night. But that never dissuaded anyone from trick or treating, as far as we recall. Schools, churches, clubs, and neighborhoods all had their parties and helped in the children's celebration of the day.

All that seems to have changed. Not only have parents needed to acknowledge the potential threat of physical danger to their children while out trick or treating, but there has also been a rising concern for the nature of the day itself. Just what *is* Halloween, anyway!? Is it something we should, after all, be celebrating? Is it consistent with our deepest beliefs and with our faith?

Well, perhaps a place to start in deciding your answers to these questions, is in examining the origin of the day. Though researchers offer some variations in this history, the consensus of opinion seems to be that our modern Halloween originated with the ancient Celts of Britain, Ireland and France. These people divided the year into two halves: the "light" half (spring and summer) and the "dark" half (autumn and winter.) October 31st stood at the point of change between the two halves. On that special night, it was believed that the veil between our world and the spirit world was thinner, and otherworldly spirits might come to earth to cause mischief. The Celts wore costumes, perhaps to hide from the spirits, perhaps to scare them away.

Over the centuries, the Romans expanded the day's festivities. They added their annual commemoration of the dead to this day's events. By the eighth century, the influence of Christianity had spread through the Roman Empire. Pope Boniface IV declared November 1st to be All Saints' Day (Or All Hallows' Day) and the evening before became Hallow's Eve, or Halloween.

Remnants of the old celebrations mixed with the new as the holiday evolved. For example, here in the United States, the carved pumpkins are elements that have Native American roots in harvest celebrations. And some claim that trick or treating was a custom brought by the Irish immigrants of the 19th century.

And so the holiday is a confoundingly strange mixture of old and new, foreign and domestic, pagan and Christian. Should we be celebrating this day? If we do, are we giving our assent to its pre-Christian origins? Some say, "yes." Some say, "no."

But the day rolls around each year and we must make some decision about it. Perhaps, at its best, it may help us celebrate the harvest, acknowledge the change of

seasons, and commemorate our beloved family and friends who have died (our saints.) It even gives us occasion to explain to our children what we deem to be evil, and discuss ways that this evil is overcome. All in all, that's a holiday worth considering.

So, do you have plans for Halloween?