

Column

On my bedroom wall hangs a needlepoint picture reading: “From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggety-beasties and things that go bump in the night. Good Lord, deliver us.” Beside the words is a tent with the silhouette of a boy and a dog.

It is one of my treasures, and like most treasures, it was given to me by a dear friend. In this case, a friend of over 40 years by the name of Marianne Nosal, now of Charleston, S.C.

Soon the frightening characters from which we pray to be delivered will be out in full force. I doubt even Covid will keep them off the streets on Halloween. Dressing up as this or that scary character is, for the most part, good fun.

Yet, not everyone goes onto where Halloween is pointing. The ‘real deal’ comes the day after on All Saints’ Day (Nov. 1). The Christian feast day traces its origin back as early as the 8th century when the Bishop of Rome (Gregory III) dedicated a chapel in St. Peter’s in honour of all saints.

On this day the focus shifts from darkness, death and grotesque characters to light, life and those whose lives have been made beautiful by the Spirit of the Living God. This is where Halloween, if we choose to celebrate it, ought to be pointing.

‘Saints’, by the way, in the New Testament refers not to a special class of the especially holy but to the whole company of God’s people. All who have been united to Christ in faith and baptism are ‘called to be saints’, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:2.

Some of these ‘saints’ may have a long way to go before reaching anything like spiritual perfection.

Indeed, this is the situation Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians. He begins by calling members of this congregation saints but then proceeds to chastise them for some very un-saint-like behavior. How can this be?

The Greek word from which we get ‘saint’ means ‘set apart’. All who name Jesus as Saviour, without exception, have been set apart for His service, but they are still works in progress. They still have to grow into their saint clothing. This process of transformation requires God’s grace, but it also requires some work on their part as well.

What kind of saints are we? Good ones must be disciplined, just as a good soldier must give single-minded attention to the rigors of army life. A wise man has said: "Without discipline faith remains pallid and unproductive." But disciplined in what way? These three are starters:

1. Disciplined in prayer. Without prayer there is no vital experience of God.
2. Disciplined in the reading and study of the scriptures. Our goal must be to find our place in God's great story.
3. Disciplined in maintaining fellowship with other believers: being in the Lord's house on the Lord's Day unless providentially hindered. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," exhorts the writer of Hebrews (10:25).

Be on your guard against things that go 'bump in the night', but more importantly resolve to be a saint, both in title and deed.

Almighty God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for All Saint's Day, the Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.