

## Column

Around this time of year there are numerous signs that Halloween is near: Jack-O'lanterns on front porches, scary figures hanging from trees and displays in shop windows. For the most part these things are innocent and meant for fun, and surely few could find any fault in them.

The tragedy -- or so it seems to me -- is not that people celebrate Halloween, but that they do so without going on to where Halloween is pointing. If we think about it, we know perfectly well that "Halloween" is a contraction of "All Hallows' Eve", and that the day that follows is All Saints' Day (Nov. 1). Nevertheless, many in today's secular culture privilege the former -- Halloween -- and ignore the latter -- All Saints'. May it not be so this year, in particular amongst those who profess and call themselves Christians.

With that said, if we are to celebrate this holiday aright, we must know something about the ones being celebrated. Who are the saints of God? Well, if we study our Bibles, we might be shocked to learn that *they are we*. Everyone who has passed through the waters of baptism and has confessed Jesus as Lord is a New Testament "saint". The Greek word is "haggios", and means "set apart" or "special".

Paul, for example, uses this word in his opening greeting to his readers in I Corinthians. There is more than a little irony in the fact that having done so, he almost immediately begins to chastise the same ones for some very un-saint-like behaviour . . . but that's another story.

Actually, the concept of God having a set apart and special people is much older than Paul and the other New Testament writers. It, in fact, goes back to the Old Testament where this language was used of the nation of Israel. Israel was a holy nation, a nation made up of God's separated and set apart people. Even so, it was not long after the death and resurrection of Jesus that Paul and the rest began reapplying this language to all those in the Messiah Jesus' family. The reason they could make this transposition was because they saw the Church, not as a totally new plant, but as the new, reconstituted Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

What all this means is that All Saints' Day -- when properly understood -- is a celebration of all who are *in Christ*. This group would include Christians alive today, no less than those who at the moment are absent from the body but present with the Lord. This group would also include some who achieved "name

recognition” but many more who were known only to a small group of people, or perhaps to God alone.

The value of such a celebration is that it reminds us that we are not in this alone. There is no such thing, I dare say, as a solo Christian. No, we are members one of another and are marching to Zion, the beautiful city of God, in a great company of believers. Those who walk beside us are there to encourage, prod us on and point us to our risen Head -- King Jesus.

Have a fun-filled Halloween, but a an even greater All Saints’!

*O 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 the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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