



Seasons of Holiness

A Parent Newsletter from the National Catholic Educational Association

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November

Día de los Muertos

El Día de los Muertos is a tradition celebrated on November 1st and 2nd throughout Mexico and Latin America. This celebration has its basis on the belief that during those two days, the deceased have divine permission to come to earth to visit their friends and relatives and to share the pleasures of the living. This might sound strange to many, but for the Mexican and Latin American people, death is considered to be part of life. As a result, it is portrayed with affection and humor by people throughout the year.

The roots of this belief stems from ancient times. The Aztecs believed that death was not the end of life, but a cycle of life. They compared life to the seasons of the year, where, after every winter, there is a spring. They believed that the continuity of life was ensured by sacrifice and heroic death. Therefore, worship of death involved worship of life because they believed in the promise of rebirth.

As one can imagine, the Spanish conquest of 1521 brought to Mexico a coalescence of Catholic attitudes and indigenous beliefs. This was a two-way process, where the indigenous people were Christianized and the Spanish descendents' fear of death diminished. Despite their Christianization, for these people, death is seen as a journey to the place of the dead and celebrations take place to welcome their dead with ceremony and respect.

All over Mexico, absent relatives may travel long distances to be with their living families at this time. Tombs are made tidy and adorned with flowers. At home, altars are adored with flowers, candlesticks, incense, and favorite foods and drinks are offered and placed on the altar. Pictures of their deceased loved ones are also displayed on the altar.

Hence, this ritual allows for the people to celebrate with their families the life and death of their deceased loved ones, who will never be forgotten.



All Saints Day – November 1st

All Saints' Day (November 1st), (also known as All Hallows' Day or Halloween) is the day after All Hallows' Eve (Halloween).

It is an opportunity for us to remember all saints and martyrs throughout Christian history. It has been a Christian tradition since the 4th century AD, but it was not until 837AD that Pope Gregory IV designated November 1st as the date. All Saints' Day is celebrated as our opportunity to reflect on our journey back to God.

"We celebrate today the solemnity of All Saints. This invites us to turn our gaze to the immense multitude of those who have already reached the blessed land, and points us on the path that will lead us to that destination."

Pope John Paul II, All Saints' Day 2003

Christmas is Coming!

Do you remember the story about the Three Kings of the Orient who brought gifts to Baby Jesus? They came from Persia (modern-day Iran). Christians in Iran celebrate Christmas as well, though they have established their own traditions. For example, on December 1st through December 24th, they begin a "*Little Fast*." This means that for the next twenty-five days, they do not eat any animal products, such as eggs, meat, milk or cheese. This is a time of peace and prayer, as well as a time to attend Mass.



The last day of the fast is December 24th. Thus, on Christmas Eve, almost before dawn on Christmas Day, they attend Mass and receive the Eucharist. It is not until they have received Communion that they are allowed to break the fast. As a result, when they return home from Mass, they enjoy a delicious Christmas dinner, which they call the "*Little Feast*". Their traditional Christmas dinner consists of a chicken stew called *harasa*. And unlike the United States, adults do not generally exchange gifts, but children do receive new clothes which they proudly wear during the Christmas week.

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Vietnam is another place where they celebrate Christmas in a festive manner. Though Vietnam is predominantly Buddhist, the French brought Christianity there. As a result, many people became Catholic and with their conversion they adopted many traditions and rituals.

However, soon after the Communists took over Vietnam in the 1970s, the Vietnamese people were not allowed to worship publicly. As a result, they had to do it in secret for many years. Fortunately, since the 1980s, they are now

allowed to resume Yuletide traditions, such as attending midnight mass on Christmas Eve. They too celebrate Christmas with a delicious meal consisting of chicken soup, turkey, and Christmas pudding. Santa Claus stuffs goodies in the children's stockings.

Today, Christmas is one of the four most important festivals of the Vietnamese year (the others are: the birthday of Buddha, the New Year, and the mid-autumn festival).

Source: <http://www.santas.net/vietnamesechristmas.htm>.

What is Ministry?

As we continue to journey this month with our Lord, I challenge you to think about your church ministry. Remember, ministry is not about "volunteer work," it is about exercising one's baptismal right and duty. Without the laity, the ordained cannot single-handedly accomplish the Church's mission; without either, the Church cannot function (CCC #905).

As Catholics, we are called to evangelize. We are called to live out the Good News through our deeds, our words, and our acts of mercy and justice.

Remember, God loves us! He sent His only son to save us. He eagerly waits for us to walk with Him.

May this month bring all of us closer to our Lord and may we continue to thank our God for the beautiful gift of life and all His creation.

Ministry is not volunteer work!

What is Simbang Gabi?

Central to the Filipino Christmas celebration is the nine-day novena to the Virgin Mary known as *Simbang Gabi* (*Mass at Dawn*). It honors the Blessed Virgin, as she joyfully anticipates the birth of Christ.

In the Philippines, the Masses began as early-morning liturgies to accommodate the working hours of farmers and fishermen. Now in urban cities *Simbang Gabi* is held in the evenings for the convenience of working people.

Filipino families enact *Panuluyan*, a form of the Mexican Posada, in anticipation of the coming birth of Jesus Christ. The oldest Philippine symbol is the *belen* (nativity set) which was introduced from the tradition started by St. Francis of Assisi in 1223. The *belen* is found mostly in churches and affluent homes, while the *parol* (lantern) is found everywhere Filipinos celebrate Christmas.

The *parol* represents the star of Bethlehem, which symbolically guides the Messiah to the house and announces that here is a family that has accepted the Messiah.

After every service it is mini-fiesta time, usually with *puto bumbong* a violet glutinous rice steamed in tubes served with sugar and grated coconut, and *salabat* (ginger tea). The novena ends on *Noche Buena* (Christmas Eve) with a midnight mass called *Misa De Aguinaldo*, "the night of light and joy."

In short, Simbang Gabi is all about solidifying the ties that we share with one another and reinforcing our unity as children of God.

Source: (www.divinemeracy.ph)

Was St. Nicholas Real?

St. Nicholas of Myra lived and acquired his reputation for sanctity long before the Church began its formal process of beatification. He became recognized as a saint by public acceptance.

Historians and hagiographers argue that most of what is said about Nicholas is legend. On the other hand, in those days there was no established process to verify miracles before canonization.

You can still find Nicholas listed in the various dictionaries of saints and you will also find his Feast Day, December 6th, listed in the Roman Calendar. However, he is listed as an optional memorial; thus churches and communities may choose to celebrate either the liturgy in honor of St. Nicholas or the liturgy for a weekday in Advent.

St. Nicholas' Feast Day is December 6th

Family Activity

To make an Advent wreath, begin with a Styrofoam circle, available at hobby or craft shops. Cut four evenly spaced holes into which you will place the four candles. Traditionally there are three purple candles and one rose candle (for the third Sunday).

Purple reminds us to turn our hearts toward God; rose is a color of joy and hope.

Place fresh evergreen branches over the Styrofoam. Replace them when they dry out in order to preserve the symbolism of the vitality of God's love. Encourage your children to participate as they are able, by gathering branches, placing the candles and so on.

