

A Day for Prayers, Remembering

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When I first arrived in Dublin, Ireland, to study, it was suggested that I visit the National Leprechaun Museum. Sure that I would not enjoy it, I didn't give it much thought. In a few months, I was given a research desk with other doctoral students, including one whom I later discovered worked in the Leprechaun Museum. When I asked about the museum, he told me it was created to preserve and catalog the old Irish folktales before they were lost or forgotten.

A couple of months later, a storyteller from the museum made a presentation to the university's Theological Society on how the Irish celebrated and understood Halloween. He told us it was the day when it was considered that the souls were the closest to the physical realm, and households would perform certain rituals so the souls would be at peace. The rituals also acknowledged the closeness of death. When the nights are growing longer, and light seems momentary, a culture turns to nature as a way of reminding themselves of death. Halloween, the Solemnity of All Saints, and the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day), it seems to me, are popularly held closely together. We remember those who have gone before us: the good, the holy (the saints), and the seemingly ordinary person (all souls). This memory is alive in the Church, perhaps in household customs (such as those in parts of Ireland), and in nature itself.

In some ways, the close connection makes a lot of sense. On November 1, we remember all those who have gone before us who imitated and participated in Christ's holiness. They now remind us, pray for us, show us that holiness is obtainable and that we are called to imitate and participate in Christ's holiness. On All Souls' Day, we pray for all the faithful who have passed before us. We also recognize the need presently to pray to God for empowerment to live Christ's holiness.

A good lens to the day is either of the options of the Second Reading (Romans 5:5-11 or Romans 6:3-9). Sin prevents us from flourishing, prevents unity with God and with one another. Both readings address the need to turn away from sin, to turn to God who in Christ saved us from sin so that we may live imbued with God's holiness. We live in hope that we might, like the saints, live in true unity with God and one another.

From the day when the Commemoration for the All the Faithful Departed was first celebrated in the tenth century,



On the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day), we pray for and remember those who have gone before us.

there has been a focus on prayers for all who have died. Unlike a funeral liturgy, during which prayers are for a particular person as he/she transitions to renewed life in Christ, All Souls' Day is about *everyone* who has gone before us. This feast, then, is both a reminder of our need to pray for and be healed by God's merciful love and a day to be reminded of those of us who have died, asking for the healing of all who await the fullness of unity with God's merciful love.

While we may not always think of leprechauns on All Souls' Day, we may be reminded of the importance of keeping the memory alive of the significant stories and people who have gone before us—whether saints or other souls. As Christian disciples, our important heritage is always rooted in the call toward God's holiness, shown to us by Christ Jesus, his holiness imitated by the saints, and which, it is hoped, we are empowered to imitate and participate in.