Halloween Reflections

As kids on Halloween, my brother and I would canvas our neighborhood trick or treating, whether dressed as cartoon characters, sports figures, or even a tube of toothpaste. Dropping off our loot at home, we jumped on our bikes to friends the neighboring subdivision, hitting as many homes as we could. Our haul was substantial enough to last us until Christmas (or at least the start of Christmas cookie season), but all the good candy was easily gone by Thanksgiving.

Halloween can be a lot of fun for kids, and for adults, too, with parties, princesses, scary movies, super heroes roaming the streets, creative costumes, and pumpkin-spice flavored everything everywhere. However, over the years the way in which the holiday is celebrated has changed. While the origin stories vary, the name by which we now call the day is a compounding of the original name for the evening of October 31st: "All Hallow's Eve." It was a precursor to the holy day of obligation of All Saints Day, and a special celebration of those who are hallowed, or holy, and among the commemorative customs of the evening was having children dress up as saints, and then over times, as others who have died. Depictions of skeletons or ghosts may have trickled in as families or communities looked ahead to All Souls Day on November 2nd. So from way back then to how Halloween is celebrated today was a long, slow, and winding road.

Many of the Halloween traditions people enjoy are fun and innocent. But some are not. Late October inevitably brings new rounds of horror movies predictably featuring evil monsters, guts & gore, comic violence, and adrenaline-pumping terror. Additionally, TV shows, video games, and movies routinely get extreme makeovers with CGI-enhancements and then stream through our electronic devices into our imaginations. It's all intended to shock (or entertain) for profit, or simply for the "fun" of it. Which means each successive year has to be scarier, uglier, and more visually intense than the previous year for people to keep consuming it. But it's impossible to unsee these images, especially for children who have brains like sponges.

Because the human person is an integration of mind, heart, soul, and body, we need to be discerning about what verbal or visual content our imaginations are exposed to. There are certain movies or activities associated with Halloween whose content or storyline appears to be a celebration of violence, or a sexualizing or glamorization of evil. Even if the intention is for "entertainment," those things have a detrimental effect on our heart and soul, especially if those sit in diametric opposition the First Commandment and are therefore objectively sinful. And so it is necessary that Christians exercise a little prudence and discernment of spirits as we approach this day. Consider: what message does our Halloween activity communicate about our faith, about our love for Christ, and the kind of person we want to be?

We all know the news of our city and our world in this day and age are saturated with stories of affliction, violence, and suffering. In general, when we as Catholic disciples look out at the world, our invitation is to ask the Lord Jesus how we can use our gifts, talents and resources to help those in need, and how we can share our resources with the church that she may bring light, peace, hope, and healing.

In the Gospels, it is very common to encounter Jesus when He is teaching and healing. Yet when he is exercising either of those ministries, we also see Him casting out demons. Christ wants us to be free from evil – be it metaphorical, spiritual, or moral evils – so that our hearts, minds, and souls can be filled with the life and love of God. Because that is when we perceive what is truly spiritually beautiful –and receive the grace to become what we perceive.