

ALL SAINTS

It was confirmation time and the bishop asked a boy to describe a saint for him. When the lad showed some hesitancy, his lordship pointed to a stained glass window enshrining the patron saint of the parish. The sun was shining through at the time. The eyes of the young hopeful followed the bishop's pointing finger and then reverted to him with a gleam of recognition. 'A saint' he said, 'is someone who lets the light shine through him'.

Saints are guided by the light of faith in the big and little decisions of life. For them their faith is not something which they practice for an hour on Sunday and then forget about for the rest of the week. For the saints, God is part of their everyday lives. It informs all they do and are.

Last night was Halloween. In pagan times it was regarded as a night of fear when demons roamed around to welcome the winter darkness. While on this subject I don't think it's right on Halloween to send out our children as Devils or Vampires. That would be resurrecting its pagan origins. For those who don't value the saints the Eve has become hollow rather than hallow. It's like celebrating New Year's Eve without a New Year's Day. Our Faith forces us to combat the dark forces of this world which will include shadowy areas in our lives. From reading the lives of the saints we see where they were painfully aware of their own sins and weaknesses and were no strangers to confession.

We should become familiar with the lives of at least the more prominent saints. They are our heroes. There are hordes of books on fantasy and fiction these days but in the saints we are dealing with real people who are now in heaven praying for us. We can't but be inspired by their lives of faith. Catholic children should be strongly encouraged to become familiar with the lives of these holy men and women.

When we were at secondary school one of the books on our recommended reading list was entitled, 'saints are not sad'. The impression you get sometimes is that a saint is a forbidding sort of person, a sort of joyless creature whose lost touch with the real world. They say that St Padre Pio, the stigmatic, had an impish sense of humour that lit up the lives of his confrères in the community - not at all like the forbidding person he is often made out to be. Sainthood and sadness don't mix.

The demons of Halloween are depicted as welcoming the darkness characterised by the end of summertime. But the saints are people who welcome into their lives Jesus who is the Light of the world and following Him with a lively faith.

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