

³⁷ Jgn GK, 246. ³⁸ Nilles, I, 481. ³⁹ RR, *Bened. Seminum et Segetum in Festo Nativitatis B.M.V.* ⁴⁰ Franz, I, 370. ⁴¹ Geramb, 175 f. ⁴² WH, 112 f.; Geramb, 158 ff.

CHAPTER

26

All Saints and All Souls

FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

ALL MARTYRS · The Church of Antioch kept a commemoration of all holy martyrs on the first Sunday after Pentecost. Saint John Chrysostom, who served as preacher at Antioch before he became patriarch of Constantinople, delivered annual sermons on the occasion of this festival. They were entitled "Praise of All the Holy Martyrs of the Entire World."¹ In the course of the succeeding centuries the feast spread through the whole Eastern Church and, by the seventh century, was everywhere kept as a public holyday.

In the West the Feast of All Holy Martyrs was introduced when Pope Boniface IV (615) was given the ancient Roman temple of the Pantheon by Emperor Phocas (610) and dedicated it as a church to the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the martyrs. The date of this dedication was May 13, and on this date the feast was then annually held in Rome.² Two hundred years later Pope Gregory IV (844) transferred the celebration to November 1. The reason for this transfer is quite interesting, especially since some scholars have claimed that the Church assigned All Saints to November 1 in order to substitute a feast of Christian significance for the pagan Germanic celebrations of the demon cult at that time of the year.³ Actually, the reason for the transfer was that the many pilgrims who came to Rome for the Feast of the

Pantheon could be fed more easily after the harvest than in the spring.⁴

ALL SAINTS · Meanwhile, the practice had spread of including in this memorial not only all martyrs, but the other saints as well. Pope Gregory III (741) had already stated this when he dedicated a chapel in St. Peter's in honor of Christ, Mary, and "all the apostles, martyrs, confessors, and all the just and perfect servants of God whose bodies rest throughout the whole world."⁵

Upon the request of Pope Gregory IV, Emperor Louis the Pious (840) introduced the Feast of All Saints in his territories. With the consent of the bishops of Germany and France he ordered it to be kept on November 1 in the whole Carolingian empire.⁶ Finally, Pope Sixtus IV (1484) established it as a holy-day of obligation for the entire Latin Church, giving it a liturgical vigil and octave.⁷ The octave was discontinued in 1955.

The purpose of the feast is twofold. As the prayer of the Mass states, "the merits of all the saints are venerated in common by this one celebration," because a very large number of martyrs and other saints could not be accorded the honor of a special festival since the days of the year would not suffice for all these individual celebrations. The second purpose was given by Pope Urban IV: Any negligence, omission, and irreverence committed in the celebration of the saints' feasts throughout the year is to be atoned for by the faithful, and thus due honor may still be offered to these saints.⁸

LITURGICAL PRAYER · *Almighty and eternal God, who hast granted us to venerate the merits of all Thy saints in one celebration: we beg Thee to bestow upon us the desired abundance of Thy mercy on account of this great number of intercessors.*

COMMEMORATION OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

HISTORY · The need and duty of prayer for the departed souls has been acknowledged by the Church at all times. It is recommended in the Scriptures of the Old Testament (2 Machabees 12, 46), and found expression not only in public and private prayers,

but especially in the offering of the Holy Sacrifice for the repose of souls. The customary dates for public services of this kind were, and still are, the day of death and burial, the seventh and thirtieth day after death (Month's Mind Mass), and the anniversary. Except for the funeral Mass, the actual observance of these dates is not made obligatory by the Church but left to the piety of relatives and friends of the deceased.⁹

The memorial feast of all departed ones in a common celebration was inaugurated by Abbot Saint Odilo of Cluny (1048). He issued a decree that all monasteries of the congregation of Cluny were annually to keep November 2 as a "day of all the departed ones" (*Omnium Defunctorum*). On November 1, after Vespers, the bell should be tolled and afterward the Office of the Dead be recited; on the next day all priests had to say Mass for the repose of the souls in purgatory.¹⁰

This observance of the Benedictines of Cluny was soon adopted by other Benedictines, and by the Carthusians. Pope Sylvester II (1003) approved and recommended it. It was some time, though, before the secular clergy introduced it in the various dioceses. From the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries it gradually spread in France, Germany, England, and Spain, until finally, in the fourteenth century, Rome placed the day of the commemoration of all the faithful departed in the official books of the Western Church for November 2 (or November 3 if the second falls on a Sunday).¹¹

November 2 was chosen in order that the memory of all the "holy spirits" both of the saints in Heaven and of the souls in purgatory should be celebrated on two successive days, and in this way to express the Christian belief in the "Communion of Saints." Since the Feast of All Saints had already been celebrated on November 1 for centuries, the memory of the departed souls in purgatory was placed on the following day.¹²

LITURGY · In the Byzantine Rite the commemoration of all the faithful departed is held on the Saturday before Sexagesima Sunday, and is called the "Saturday of the Souls" (*Psychosabbaton*).¹³ The Armenians celebrate it on Easter Monday, with the solemn Office of the Dead.¹⁴ The Mass, however, is that of the Resurrection. An interesting and moving observance is held in the

Syrian-Antiochene Rite, where they celebrate on three separate days: on Friday before Septuagesima they commemorate all departed priests; on Friday before Sexagesima, all the faithful departed; and on Friday before Quinquagesima, "all those who died in strange places, away from their parents and friends."¹⁵

Pope Benedict XV in 1915 allowed all priests to say three Masses on All Souls' Day in order to give increased help to the suffering souls in purgatory.¹⁶ The Church has also granted to all faithful special privileges of gaining indulgences for the holy souls on November 1 and 2. The Office of the Dead is recited by priests and religious communities. In many places the graves in the cemeteries are blessed on the eve or in the morning of All Souls' Day, and a solemn service is usually held in parish churches.

The liturgical color at all services on November 2 is black. The Masses are part of the group called "Requiem" Masses because they start with the words *Requiem aeternam dona eis* (Eternal rest grant unto them).¹⁷

The sequence sung at the solemn Mass on All Souls' Day (and on other occasions) is the famous poem *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath) written by a thirteenth-century Franciscan.¹⁸ It has often been ascribed to Thomas of Celano (1250), the friend and biographer of Saint Francis of Assisi, though the authorship is not certain.

FOLKLORE

RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS • The custom of decorating graves and praying in cemeteries is general in all Catholic countries, both in Europe and America.¹⁹ On the afternoon of All Saints' Day or in the morning of All Souls the faithful visit each individual grave of relatives and friends. Sometimes the congregation, led by the priest, walks in procession to the cemetery. There they pray for all the holy souls in front of the cemetery chapel, then the priest recites the liturgical prayers for the dead and blesses the graves with holy water. Afterward the families separate to offer private prayers at the graves of their loved ones.

During the week preceding All Saints crowds of people may be seen in the cemeteries, usually in the evening after work, decorat-

ing the graves of their dear ones with flowers, tending the lawn, and spreading fresh white gravel around the tombs. Candles, protected by little glass lanterns, are placed around the graves or at the foot of the tombstones, to be lighted on All Saints' eve and left burning through the night. It is an impressive, unforgettable sight to look upon the hundreds and often thousands of lights quietly burning in the darkness and dreary solitude of a cemetery. People call them "lights of the holy souls" (*Seelenlichter*).²⁰

To visit the graves of dear ones on All Souls is considered a duty of such import that many people in Europe will travel from a great distance to their home towns on All Saints' Day in order to perform this obligation of love and piety.

It is an ancient custom in Catholic sections of central Europe to ring the church bells at the approach of dusk on All Saints' Day, to remind the people to pray for the souls in purgatory. When the pealing of these bells is heard, families gather in one room of their home, extinguish all other lights save the blessed candle (kept from Candlemas Day), which is put on the table.²¹

In the rural sections of Brittany four men alternate in tolling the church bell for an hour on All Saints' Day after dark. Four other men go from farm to farm during the night, ringing hand bells and chanting at each place: "Christians awake, pray to God for the souls of the dead, and say the *Pater* and *Ave* for them." From the house comes the reply "Amen" as the people rise for prayer.

In most countries of South America All Souls' Day is a public holiday. In Brazil people flock by the thousands to the cemeteries all morning, light candles and kneel at the graves in prayer. The deep silence of so many persons in the crowded cemetery deeply impresses the stranger. In Puerto Rico, people will walk for miles to the graves of their loved ones. The women often carry vases of flowers and water, for they know they can get no water at the cemetery to keep the flowers fresh. They wear their best clothes as they trudge along in the hot sun. Whole truckloads of people will arrive at the cemetery if the distance is too far to walk. The priest visits each grave and says the prayers for the dead as the mourners walk along with him. Sometimes the ceremony lasts for hours and it is near midnight when the tired pastor visits the last graves.

Among the native populations in the Philippines, a novena is held for the holy souls before November 2. In places where the cemetery is close to the town, candles are brought to be burned at the tombs and prayers are said every night. During these nine days the people also prepare their family tombs for the great Feast of the Souls. Tomb niches and crosses are repainted, hedges trimmed, flowers planted, and all weeds are removed from the graves. On the evening of All Saints' Day young men go from door to door asking for gifts in the form of cookies, candy, and pastry, and they sing a traditional verse in which they represent holy souls liberated from purgatory and on their way to Heaven.

In Poland, and in Polish churches of the United States, the faithful bring to their parish priest on All Souls' Day paper sheets with black borders called *Wypominki* (Naming) on which are written the names of their beloved dead. During the evening devotions in November, and on Sundays, the names are read from the pulpit and prayers are offered for the repose of the souls.

The Church has not established any season or octave in connection with All Souls. The faithful, however, have introduced an "octave" of their own, devoting the eight days after All Souls to special prayer, penance, and acts of charity. This custom is widespread in central Europe. People call this particular time of the year "Soul Nights" (*Seelennächte*). Every evening the rosary is said for the holy souls within the family while the blessed candle burns. Many go to Mass every morning. A generous portion of the meal is given to the poor each day; and the faithful abstain from dances and other public amusements out of respect for the holy souls. This is a deeply religious practice filled with a genuine spirit of Christian charity which overshadows and elevates the unholy customs of ancient pagan lore.²²

PRE-CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS · Our pagan forefathers kept several "cult of the dead" rites at various times of the year. One of these periods was the great celebration at the end of the fall and the beginning of winter (around November 1). Together with the practices of nature and demon lore (fires, masquerades, fertility cults) they also observed the ritual of the dead with many traditional rites. Since All Saints and All Souls happened to be

placed within the period of such an ancient festival, some of the pre-Christian traditions became part of our Christian feast and associated with Christian ideas.²³

There is, for instance, the pre-Christian practice of putting food at the graves or in the homes at such times of the year when the spirits of the dead were believed to roam their familiar earthly places. The beginning of November was one of these times. By offering a meal or some token food to the spirits, people hoped to please them and to avert any possible harm they could do. Hence came the custom of baking special breads in honor of the holy souls and bestowing them on the children and the poor. This custom is widespread in Europe. "All Souls' bread" (*Seelenbrot*) is made and distributed in Germany, Belgium, France, Austria, Spain, Italy, Hungary, and in the Slavic countries.²⁴

In some sections of central Europe boys receive on All Souls' Day a cake shaped in the form of a hare, and girls are given one in the shape of a hen (an interesting combination of "spirit bread" and fertility symbols). These figure cakes are baked of the same dough as the festive cakes that the people eat on All Saints' Day and which are a favorite dish all over central Europe. They are made of braided strands of sweet dough and called "All Saints' cakes" (*Heiligenstriezel* in German, *Strucel Swiateczne* in Polish, *Mindszenti Kalácska* in Hungarian).²⁵

In western Europe people prepare on All Souls' Day a meal of cooked beans or peas or lentils, called "soul food," which they afterward serve to the poor together with meat and other dishes. In Poland the farmers hold a solemn meal on the evening of All Souls' Day, with empty seats and plates ready for the "souls" of departed relatives. Onto the plates members of the family put parts of the dinner. These portions are not touched by anyone, but afterward are given to beggars or poor neighbors.²⁶ In the Alpine provinces of Austria destitute children and beggars go from house to house, reciting a prayer or singing a hymn for the holy souls, receiving small loaves of the "soul bread" in reward. There, too, people put aside a part of everything that is cooked on All Souls' Day and give meals to the poor.²⁷ In northern Spain and in Madrid people distribute and eat a special pastry called "Bones of the Holy" (*Huesos de Santo*). In Catalonia All Souls' pastry is called *Panellets* (little breads).

In Hungary the "Day of the Dead" (*Halottak Napja*) is kept with the traditional customs common to all people in central Europe. In addition, they invite orphan children into the family for All Saints' and All Souls' days, serving them generous meals and giving them new clothes and toys.

In Brittany the farmers visit the graves of their departed relatives on *Jour des morts* (Day of the Dead), kneeling bareheaded at the mound in long and fervent prayer. Then they sprinkle the grave with holy water, and finally, before leaving, pour milk over the grave as a libation "for the holy souls." In every house a generous portion of the dinner is served before an empty seat and afterward given to the hungry.

LEGENDS · Many other customs of the ancient cult of the dead have survived as superstitions to this day. The belief that the spirits of the dead return for All Souls' Day is expressed in a great number of legends and traditions. In the rural sections of Poland the charming story is told that at midnight on All Souls' Day a great light may be seen in the parish church; the holy souls of all departed parishioners who are still in purgatory gather there to pray for their release before the very altar where they used to receive the Blessed Sacrament when still alive. Afterward the souls are said to visit the scenes of their earthly life and labors, especially their homes. To welcome them by an external sign the people leave doors and windows open on All Souls' Day.²⁸

In the rural sections of Austria the holy souls are said to wander through the forests on All Souls' Day, sighing and praying for their release, but unable to reach the living by external means that would indicate their presence.²⁹ For this reason, the children are told to pray aloud while going through the open spaces to church and cemetery, so the poor souls will have the great consolation of seeing that their invisible presence is known and their pitiful cries for help are understood and answered.

LITURGICAL PRAYER · *O God, Creator and Redeemer of all the faithful, grant to the souls of Thy servants departed the remission of all their sins, that through our devout prayers they may obtain the pardon which they have always desired.*

HALLOWEEN

DRUIDIC ELEMENT · Unlike the familiar observance of All Souls, Halloween traditions have never been connected with Christian religious celebrations of any kind. Although the name is taken from a great Christian feast (Allhallows' Eve), it has nothing in common with the Feast of All Saints, and is, instead, a tradition of pre-Christian times that has retained its original character in form and meaning.

Halloween customs are traced back to the ancient Druids. This is attested to by the fact that they are still observed only in those sections of Europe where the population is wholly or partly of Celtic stock. In ancient times, around November 1 the burning of fires marked the beginning of winter. Such Halloween fires are kindled in many places even now, especially in Wales and Scotland.³⁰

Another, and more important, tradition is the Druidic belief that during the night of November 1 demons, witches, and evil spirits roamed the earth in wild and furious gambols of joy to greet the arrival of "their season"—the long nights and early dark of the winter months. They had their fun with the poor mortals that night, frightening, harming them, and playing all kinds of mean tricks.³¹ The only way, it seemed, for scared humans to escape the persecution of the demons was to offer them things they liked, especially dainty food and sweets. Or, in order to escape the fury of these horrible creatures, a human could disguise himself as one of them and join in their roaming. In this way they would take him for one of their own and he would not be bothered. That is what people did in ancient times, and it is in this very form the custom has come down to us, practically unaltered, as our familiar Halloween celebration: the horrible masks of demons and witches, the disguise in strange and unusual gowns, the ghost figures, the frightening gestures and words, the roaming through the streets at night, the pranks played, and finally the threatening demand of a "trick or treat." The pumpkin "ghosts" or jack-o'-lanterns with a burning candle inside may well be a combination of the demon element and the Halloween fire. These pumpkins are found all over central Europe at Halloween,

in France, southern Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the Slavic countries. So is the custom of masquerading and "trick or treat" rhymes, at least in the rural sections where ancient traditions are still observed.³²

ROMAN ELEMENT · In those countries that once belonged to the Roman Empire there is the custom of eating or giving away fruit, especially apples, on Halloween. It spread to neighboring countries: to Ireland and Scotland from Britain, and to the Slavic countries from Austria. It is probably based upon a celebration of the Roman goddess Pomona, to whom gardens and orchards were dedicated. Since the annual Feast of Pomona was held on November 1, the relics of that observance became part of our Halloween celebration, for instance the familiar tradition of "ducking" for apples.³³

¹ PG, 1, 706 ff. ² DACL, 15.1 (1950), 438. ³ Frazer, 633. ⁴ Belet, *Rationale divin. offic.*, 127; PL, 202, 133. ⁵ LP, I, 417. ⁶ S. Adonis *Martyrol.*, Nov. 1; PL, 123, 387. ⁷ Kellner, 326. ⁸ *Decr. Si Dominum*; Nilles, I, 313 (Latin text). ⁹ DACL, 12.1 (1935), 27 ff. ¹⁰ *Statutum S. Odilonis pro Defunctis*; PL, 142, 1038. ¹¹ H. Leclercq, *La Fête des Morts*, DACL, 12.1 (1935), 34 ff. ¹² DACL, 4.1 (1920), 427 ff. ¹³ Nilles, II, 90 ff. ¹⁴ Nilles, II, 561. ¹⁵ Nilles, II, 643. ¹⁶ C. A. Kneller, *Geschichtliches über die drei Messen am Allerseelentag*, ZKTh, 42 (1918), 74 ff. ¹⁷ DACL, 12.1 (1935), 31 ff. ¹⁸ HRL, 252 f. (excellent commentary on author and poem). ¹⁹ H. Leclercq, *Fleurs pour les défunts*, DACL, 5.2 (1923), 1693 ff. ²⁰ M. Kollofrath, *Das Seelenlicht. Eine volkskundliche Studie*, in *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, November 2, 1937; VL, 169. ²¹ Geramb, 181; Benet, 84. ²² Koren, 174; Geramb, 180. ²³ Frazer, 632 ff. ²⁴ Gugitz, II, 157 f.; ES, 15 ("Soul Cake"). ²⁵ Gugitz, II, 154 ff. (*Der Allerheiligenstriezel*); Koren, 175; Geramb, 180 f. ²⁶ Benet, 84 f. ²⁷ Geramb, 190 f. ²⁸ Benet, 84 f.; VL, 169 f. ²⁹ Koren, 175 f.; ES, 15. ³⁰ Frazer, 632 ff. ("Halloween Fires"). ³¹ Gugitz, II, 158; Frazer, 634 f. ³² ES, 140; Chambers, II, 228 f. ³³ W. Ehlers, *Pomona*, PW, 21, 1876 ff.