

WHY HALLOWEEN?

Throughout the Scriptures, mention is made of the devil, of demons, of evil spirits, of the Adversary, of Satan (a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning "adversary") of the Father of Lies, of the Prince of this world, or of Lucifer (often translated as the Morning Star or Lightbringer). The first encounter is in the third chapter of Genesis, wherein is described the temptation of our first-created parents, Adam and Eve, by this power in the form of a serpent, which ever after remains a principal appellation of our enemy.

Certainly, the subject cannot be dismissed as minor. The activity of the Serpent, when he tempted man to disobedience in Eden, brought about the Fall: our exile from Eden, our loss of communion with Divinity, the enmity of the physical world, the rebellious disharmony and confusion of our nature, the darkening of the divine image within us, and the loss of immortality with its consequent curse of pain, sickness, travail, labor and sweat, corruption and death. All of our miseries began with our Foreparents' consent to the temptation. By consenting to disobey God, they departed from the walled Eden of God's immediate loving care and providence; and by supplanting God's will with their own, they took their own care upon themselves. Then "their eyes were opened and they perceived that they were naked" [Gen. 3:8], i.e., unprotected by God. Being exiled from the delight of God's providence and the walls of His care and defense, "they feared" and thus were made captive of Satan, coming under his care since they preferred his counsel to God's.

For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of His own eternity; but through envy of the devil came death into the world; and they that are of his portion do find it. [Wisdom of Solomon 2:24]

If any association with things demonic is a sin against our own well being, then why Halloween?

The feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times among the Celtic peoples of Great Britain, Ireland and Northern France. These pagan peoples believed that life was born from death. Therefore, they celebrated the beginning of the "new year" in the fall (on the eve of October 31 and into the day of November 1) when, as they believed, the season of cold, darkness, decay and death began. A certain deity whom they called Samhain was believed by the Celts to be the Lord of death and it was he whom they honored at their New Year's festival.

There were, from an Orthodox Christian point of view, many diabolical beliefs and practices associated with this feast which, it will be clear, have endured to this time. On the eve of the New Year's festival, the Druids, who were the priests of the Celtic cult, instructed their people to extinguish all hearth fires and lights. On the evening of the festival a huge bonfire built from oak branches, which they believed to be sacred, was ignited. Upon this fire sacrifices of crops, animals and even human beings were burned as an offering in order to appease and cajole Samhain, the Lord of Death. It was also believed that Samhain, being pleased by their faithful offerings, allowed the souls of the

dead to return to their homes for a festal visit on this day. It is from this belief that the practice of wandering about in the dark dressed up in costumes imitating ghosts, witches, hobgoblins, fairies and demons evolved. For the living entered into fellowship and communion with the dead by what was, and still is, a ritual act of imitation, through costume and the activity of wandering around in the dark of night, even as the souls of the dead were believed to wander.

The dialogue of trick or treat is also an integral part of this system of beliefs and practices. It was believed that the souls of the dead who had entered into the world of darkness, decay and death, and therefore into total communion with and submission to Samhain the Lord of Death, bore the affliction of great hunger on their festal visit. Out of this grew the practice of begging, which was a further ritual enactment and imitation of what the Celts believed to be the activities of the souls of the dead on their festal visit. Associated with this is the still further implication that if the souls of the dead and their imitators were not appeased with "treats," i.e. offerings, then the wrath and anger of Samhain, whose angels and servants the souls and their imitators had become, would be unleashed through a system of "tricks," or, as an Orthodox Christian would understand it, curses.

From this it is obvious that participating in these practices, even in simple-minded ignorance, is not spiritually profitable. The sad fact is the ever-increasing number of confused people who profess themselves pagans, wiccans, witches and the homosexual community hold Halloween as their high festival.

We invite the families of the Cathedral to attend the vespers for the feast of Saint John of Kronstandt and the Harvest Party for the children. Instruct your children that we Christians keep our own feasts and we don't need to look to pagan sources for celebration.

For every good giving (the harvest) and every perfect gift (our salvation) is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights (James 1:17)

[Compiled by the clergy of Saint Nectarios Cathedral, Seattle Washington]