

HALLOWEEN: CAN PLAY-ACTING EVIL BECOME TOO REAL?

At Halloween time, questions about how Christians should or should not celebrate Halloween often arise. While this can be a very fun holiday, especially for children, it is good to be prudent and observe certain cautions. In the Vatican's official newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* there was an article in 2009 where liturgical expert, Fr. Joan Maria Canals, cautioned parents to be aware of the undercurrent of occultism that is often present at Halloween, noting that a focus on the macabre and ghoulish has even crept into the celebrations of young children. He encouraged parents to direct the meaning of the feast towards wholesomeness and beauty rather than terror, fear and death.

Does this mean that everything to do with Halloween is evil? No. Even the word "Halloween" comes from the Christian feast, "All Hallow's Eve," which is the vigil for "All Saints Day" on November 1st. As far as any pagan origins or elements that may be attributed to the celebration of Halloween, please note that the Church has a long tradition of rehabilitating pagan feasts. But, having said this, we do need to exercise prudence. Our celebrations of Halloween should not *glorify* evil or celebrate "*all things forbidden and dark.*" Children have lots of fun dressing up in costumes, but, as in all things, we should guide them toward that which is wholesome (what is true, good and beautiful), and away from an emulation of or a preoccupation with dark things.

One possibility is to celebrate Halloween in a more overtly Christian way, as "All Hallow's Eve" – the night before All Saints Day. We pray "Hallowed be thy name..." in the Our Father because we want to keep the name of God "holy" or "hallowed." The "hallowed ones" of "All Hallow's Eve" are the holy ones – the saints in heaven. Why not dress your child up as a saint instead of a character of evil?

We need to be conscious of what is happening in the world around us. Our culture is increasingly unfriendly toward Christian values, influencing us and our children in other directions. This is certainly the case with Halloween. Times have changed since today's parents went trick-or-treating as children. People are increasingly seeking out the "paranormal" through "ghost hunting" and other unhealthy avenues. The Wicca religion, occultism, neo-paganism, "white" witchcraft, and even Satanism are on the rise as accepted religions. These are things we want to avoid.

Many of the themes in the [New Age movement](#) are related to the occult and pagan spiritualism. Evil and the occult are real dangers and should be avoided. We should not have anything to do with a Ouija board, 8 ball, dowsing (divining) rods, ghost hunting, psychics, seeking out paranormal manifestations, séances, [Reiki](#), channeling psychic "energy," [Yoga](#), [Freemasonry](#), magic charms or potions, or having one's palm or fortune "read." TV is full of shows (especially at Halloween) where people contact the dead, seek out ghosts, engage in witchcraft, or various kinds of magic and sorcery, either by spells, potions, or "artifacts" with special powers.

In all things, we should seek out the guidance of the objective teachings of the Church. This is especially important in anything that touches on the area of the occult. We should remember that all of these activities are strictly forbidden by our faith as grave violations of the 1st Commandment. Our faith expressly forbids these things, as well as any dabbling with the occult or search for supernatural power apart from God. While most of those who claim to be able to do things (like reading your future) through the powers of the occult are simply charlatans, playing around with such things can open one's self up to the realm of evil and, in some cases, have serious spiritual consequences.

Has Halloween then become a time to celebrate all of the things that our faith forbids? It is one thing to tell stories of wizards in a fantasy world such as *The Lord of the Rings* (a great book and movie!). It is quite another to go looking to contact ghosts or magical powers in the real world (something explicitly forbidden by the Bible).

Evil is real. Dioceses across the country are seeing an increase in demonic processions. Bishops are training exorcists and educating priests about these dangers. Involvement with the occult can make one vulnerable to the influence of evil spirits. We never want to grant permission for any spirit or psychic energy to interact with us. Let's keep our ourselves and our children far away from anything remotely associated with the occult and discourage them from emulating evil characters for "play" or "fun." Does this mean we should live in fear or see demons behind every bush? No! The light of Christ is stronger than any form of evil! We simply need to be prudent and vigilant.

Children are naturally curious and evil is subtle, seductive and deceptive. We should guard our children against any

kind of fascination with evil, magic, sorcery, the occult or any kind of special supernatural powers that do not come from God. We should be careful in supervising our children's viewing of TV shows, movies, or playing of video or computer games that may lead them to becoming overly intrigued with these subjects. We should not allow our children to play with a Ouija board, an 8 ball, consult a psychic, have their palms read, their fortunes told, or participate in a séance. These things, even in play, can be dangerous. Evil and the occult are real dangers and should never become the focus of our children's "play-time."

Finally, evil and the occult almost always are wrapped in violence of some kind. Because of the acceptance of extreme violence in our media, all of us, children included, are desensitized to its effects. When choosing a Halloween costume, remember that we want to exemplify the good, not glorify or emulate what is evil or violent!

What does the Church teach about "Magic & Sorcery"?

The Church has always guided us away from superstition or any practice that relies on belief in magic or the like. To put our belief in these things shows a lack of faith and trust in God. God alone has power to save!

The Catechism clearly gives the Church's position on the occult, on magic and sorcery.

2138 "Superstition is a departure from the worship that we give to the true God. It is manifested in idolatry, as well as in various forms of divination and magic."

2117 "All practices of *magic* or *sorcery*, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others - even if this were for the sake of restoring their health - are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. These practices are even more to be condemned when accompanied by the intention of harming someone, or when they have recourse to the intervention of demons. Wearing charms is also reprehensible. *Spiritism* often implies divination or magical practices; the Church for her part warns the faithful against it. Recourse to so-called traditional cures does not justify either the invocation of evil powers or the exploitation of another's credulity."

Scripture warns us:

"You shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you... anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD; and because of these abominable practices the LORD your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. For these nations, which you are about to dispossess, give heed to soothsayers and to diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you so to do." Deuteronomy 18:9-14 (Also see Ezekiel 13:20; Acts 19:19; Rev. 21:8; Rev. 22:12)

What to do if you or your children have been involved in things related to the occult.

If you or your children have participated in anything associated with the occult or have engaged in any of these forbidden practices, renounce them and ask God to guard you in his peace, and keep you in his perfect will. Willingly choosing to engage in any of these forbidden practices is a sin against the 1st Commandment. Receive the sacrament of Reconciliation as soon as possible to heal and strengthen you. The occult is nothing to mess with. If you are aware of any ongoing problems, do not hesitate to contact a priest that you trust. There are resources available to help you.

As you move on in life, praying a sincere "Our Father" is a good way to remain in God's presence. This affirms your desire to follow God's will and belong to his Kingdom. When you pray the words "*deliver us from evil,*" you are asking God to remove from you any danger of evil. Here are some other daily prayers that ask God for his help and protection: Angel of God (Guardian Angel prayer), Morning Offering, Act of Contrition, St. Michael prayer...

Lastly, we should never be fearful or scrupulous. God's love and protection is infinitely greater than all the forces of evil put together. God always hears and answers his children when we call out to Him. Living in a state of grace is the best way to safeguard ourselves against all evil.

Fr. Martín