

Discovering



SAINT PATRICK

BY
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EVEN THOUGH IT WAS THE ANCIENT CELTIC tribes of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany who originally celebrated Halloween, the holiday does have a Christian connection. In 835, Pope Gregory moved the celebration for all the martyrs from May 13 to November 1, where it later became known as the celebration of all saints. The night before became known as "holy evening" or "All Hallow Even". The name was eventually shortened to Halloween, and reverted to its pagan origins of warding off evil spirits and celebrating the oncoming of winter.

According to a recent media report, a comparison of 2007 to 2006 figures reveals that the number of people participating in Halloween is declining. While the report didn't say what the reasons are for this development, it seems the perfect opportunity for helping children to discover their patron saints.

On reading about the apparently growing lack of interest in celebrating Halloween, I immediately remembered my first grade class in parochial school. Sr. Mary Michael was my first-grade teacher, and it was she who told us, and our mothers, that we could come to school on Halloween dressed like our patron saint.

My mother and grandmother had a great devotion to St. Anne, the mother of Our Blessed Mother. So great was my mother's devotion to the Blessed Mother that before I was born she made a promise that whether the child she was carrying was a boy or a girl she would dress me in blue and white for one year in thanksgiving for a healthy delivery. My mother's due date was even July 26th, the feast day of St. Anne. She didn't make it to July 26th so instead I was named after my father's grandmother and given the middle name "Anne". (My mother kept her promise to the Blessed Mother, too, and she spent the first year of my life getting compliments on her little boy. She explained that the baby dressed in blue and white was really a little girl dressed like Our Lady.)

I remember this opportunity to learn about St. Anne at Halloween with fond memories of my mother going to great lengths to get gold material to cut and sew into St. Anne's gown and her making me a gold crown that was an exact replica of St. Anne's. After much anticipation and anxiety about the procession of saints I was to participate in at school, I fell ill and was unable to go to school that day. My sister would eventually wear St. Anne's outfit two years later. Many a writer, through illness, is born!

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SAINT ANNE

I come from a family that practiced devotions as part of the daily reality of their Catholic faith. I attended the first grade of my parochial school in 1963-64 just as the Second Vatican Council was underway and redefining Catholic priorities. Devotions were still very much a part of Catholicism. It seems that since then devotions, as a practice, have declined. I even have a friend who spent ten years in holy orders who today describes herself as a "no frills Catholic", because she doesn't practice devotions. From what I gather the Mass is her full focus, and this focus solely on the Eucharist seems to be a development since Vatican II.

Interest in, and devotion to the saints, though, is part of the rich heritage and texture of Catholicism. The saints are not only role models, but our spiritual friends. So, introducing children to their patron saints is a wonderful way of teaching them about history, faith, culture, possibilities, and many other things. The saints provide us with a perfect opportunity for connecting with children, for instilling the faith, and for exploring the possibilities for community within Catholicism.

By looking at a Catholic calendar with a child, you can determine the saint associated with the child's date of birth and name. Some children today have not been named for the saints or the apostles, but those children can always use the name of the saint associated with their birthday. Young children might find a saint name that they would like to take as their own when it is time for Confirmation. Alternatively, just in case there is not a saint associated with their birthday, they can