

Days celebrate 'heavenly harvest of saints'

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

October 31 and November 1 and 2 say almost as much about the mysteries underlying Catholicism as do Easter and Christmas.

On those three days, by praying to the saints and for all deceased souls, Christians acknowledge the spiritual world's influence over them, and their influence over those in the spiritual world.

And whether they consciously acknowledge it, Halloween revelers who dress up as ghosts, goblins, demons and devils point to a belief in the world of the dead — and, in particular, the world of the evil dead.

Yet as numerous scholars have noted, it isn't necessary for Halloween to conjure images of hellish figures in order for the holiday to move people's souls.

The word "Halloween," in fact, is a contraction of "The Eve of All Hallows" — the day before the Christian feast of All Saints' Day. All Saints' Day is followed on Nov. 2 by All Souls' Day or the "Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed."

Although Oct. 31 has become synonymous with the mischievous world of demons, Halloween can have more positive meanings, according to the 1991 *Sourcebook for Sundays and Seasons*, published by Liturgy Training Publications in Chicago.

"Secular cultures have turned All Saints' Eve into everything rotten and superstitious about humans," the *Sourcebook* noted in its section on "The Solemnity of All Saints." "Perhaps this is the church's fault. We too often forgot the Easter roots of this day. We failed to pass on the stories of how ghosts and skeletons and cemeteries point to the heavenly Jerusalem."

The "heavenly Jerusalem" had become the destination of many early Christians who were martyred for their faith. By the fourth century, the *Sourcebook* notes, Christians in the East observed a festival for all martyrs on the Sunday after Pentecost.

By the sixth and seventh centuries, Christians in the West had adopted the custom, although Adolf Adam's *The Liturgical Year* notes that the feast's date varied from region to region. Under the seventh-century Pope Boniface IV, Adam wrote, May 13 became the established day because it was on that date that Roman Emperor Phocas gave the pope the Pantheon.

The pope consecrated the Pantheon as a Christian church in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the martyrs. Adam reported: "On this day of consecration, the pope had 28 wagonloads of martyrs' bones brought to the church from the catacombs."

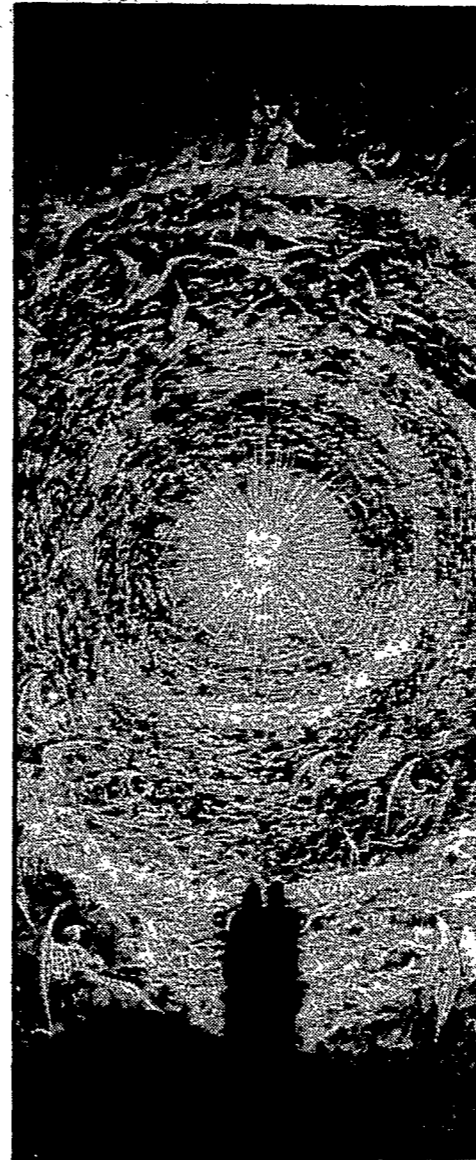
All Saints' Day's roots in the martyrdom of the church is highlighted by the first New Testament reading that day, which is drawn from the Book of Revelation, explained Father Thomas P. Mull, priest consultant to the diocesan Office of Liturgy.

The readings describe the multitude of saints who have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb.

"It's a vision of the world to come," Father Mull commented.

According to a number of experts, the church in medieval Ireland and England seems to have settled on Nov. 1 as the date for modern celebration of All Saints. Nov. 1 was the Celtic New Year, coinciding with harvest time. Church scholars today sometimes refer to All Saints' Day as a celebration of the heavenly harvest of the saints.

Dorothy Hinkle, one of two kindergar-



Gustav Doré
In Volume II of the Henry Erving Edition of Dante's *Vision of Paradise*, this engraving illustrates Canto XXXI, lines 1-3: "In fashion, as a snow white rose, lay then before my view the saintly multitude, which in his own blood Christ espoused."

ten teachers at St. Michael's School in Newark, summed up the meaning of Halloween and All Saints' Day by pointing to the way children at her school dress on both days.

"We're monsters one day, and the next day we become saints," she quipped.

Actually, the kindergartners at St. Michael's can't become too monstrous on Halloween, according to Carol Archunde, school secretary. She said the school discourages children from dressing as skeletons or devils for their Halloween parties.

"We prefer little ghosts and witches — that's OK," she said. "Not devils, nothing really frightening." The school encourages children to focus on the holier aspects of the holiday weekend, rather than its more demonic features, she explained.

On Nov. 1, St. Michael's kindergartners will dress in full costumes as the saints of their choice and lead a procession of entire student body into the church to the melody of "The Saints Go Marchin' In," Archunde and Hinkle said.

"The little ones love it because they're the focal point of the Mass," Hinkle said. She added that she encourages her charges to pray for all the souls who have no one to pray for them on All Souls' Day.

The liturgy on All Souls' Day — Nov. 2 — emphasizes the "connectedness" of those on earth and those in the afterlife, Father Mull observed.

For example, he said, the readings on All Souls' Day are taken from the same body of readings the church uses for funerals.

The passage from John's Gospel for Nov. 2 might be construed as pointing to the true significance of All Souls. "In my Father's house are many rooms ... I go and prepare a place for you," Jesus says.

During these three days, Christians can reflect on those rooms, and what Jesus is doing to prepare them.

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