

Reflections on the beauty of Autumn, the saints, and the circle of life

It has been a whirlwind of a week for me here at John Carroll Campus Ministry: our first overnight Junior Retreat of this school year, the start of the second marking period (where has the time gone?), Halloween, the first day of November (again, where has the time gone?), and today's celebration of All Saints Day with Mass and our annual Memorial Service. Busy, busy....

On Oct. 29 I shared with you about the beauty and grace-filled experiences of retreats at the Msgr. O'Dwyer Retreat House (Read my reflections [here](#).) The weather has been so lovely this week. It was a blessing just to drive from Bel Air to Sparks in northern Baltimore County through the back roads enjoying the vivid colors of the trees in the late afternoon sunshine. Simply spectacular. Since I live so close to school I don't often have a length of time alone in the car to appreciate the beauty of the changing seasons.



Autumn beauty in the John Carroll courtyard

On Wednesday, Oct. 30 one of our spirited Advisory groups here at John Carroll did some "reverse trick or treating" and brought around bags of candy to each teacher as their way of saying thanks. These costumed students and their advisor Jake Hollin (John Carroll '92) call themselves the Mighty Ducks and they love to share joy wherever they go.



Jake Hollin and his Mighty Ducks Advisory

Halloween:

Halloween always brings lots of opportunity to share joy (and candy!!) with young people of all ages. I remember the days when my kids were little and rushing into their costumes to join their friends to trick or treat through the neighborhood. We lived in a very family-oriented community back in the 1980s and there were lots of parents and kids walking the sidewalks and enjoying the festivities. Many parents agree that Halloween seems to bring everyone outdoors to meet and greet each other. The ensuing photographs make memories that will last through the years to come.

Our adorable grandson Tyler was a minion last night



All Saints Day:

But the culmination of this week has been today's celebration of the Solemnity of All Saints. We remember and honor the incredible holiness of all the saints in heaven, the 'communion of saints,' both those who were canonized (like St. Francis of Assisi and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton), and those who have died who were known to their families as incredible role models of the faith which they passed down to their children and grandchildren. These holy men and women who have gone before us marked with the sign of their faith and are now in the glory of heaven with the saints. This draws to mind my saintly Italian great-grandmother who prayed the rosary each afternoon in her chair in the living room and who was known to sit in prayer through multiple Sunday morning Masses at St. Leo's in Little Italy. I think of her as a saint in heaven, a role model to me especially in my younger years and one whose intercession from heaven I am certain has helped me in tough times.



"The saints have no need of honor from us; neither does our devotion add the slightest thing to what is theirs. But, I tell you, when I think of them, I

feel myself enflamed by a tremendous yearning.” —Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

Perhaps you read about Pope Francis’ message during his Angelus at the Vatican Nov. 1. He said that “saints aren’t superheroes nor were they born perfect. They are like us, each one of us,” just that when they experienced the life-changing encounter with God, they never left his side.

The Holy Father went on to explain how we should follow the path to holiness: The path “has a name and a face. It’s the face of Jesus Christ. He teaches us to become saints.”

Read about Pope’s Francis’ secrets to becoming a saint [here](#) .

Called to be saints:

What an overwhelming realization that you and I are called to be saints!! When we meditate on the mystery of life from a faith-perspective we realize that our call to holiness means that we can look with joy to our eternal destiny, life with our Father in heaven. Pope Francis reminds us that the way to holiness “is beautiful, it’s a beautiful journey” with the “saints on the sidelines encouraging everyone to not be afraid.”



The circle of life:

Did you ever think about the circle of life as the Church remembers those who have died during the month of November? Though it may be sad to remember our loved ones in the sense that they are no longer with us here on earth, we celebrate and remember their lives as they are now with our Lord and have the reward of their faith.

Part of the deepest joys and sorrows that we experience are related to this ongoing circle of life. The joy experienced from the blessing of new babies as gifts from God our Creator is balanced by sorrow when those we love leave us for their eternal reward. The beauty of our Christian faith is that we believe in the promise of the

Resurrection and know that God awaits our return to Him in Heaven.

We take comfort from this certainty: Jesus died to open the doors to Paradise for us and our loved ones. May we find solace in the promises of our faith as we pray for our beloved family and friends who have gone before us in the month ahead.

The circle of life in my family:



My daughter Meighan is expecting our second grandchild, a baby girl due in January. She was surprised earlier today by her colleagues from the faculty at Gunpowder Elementary School, Perry Hall with a baby shower. I know that her baby will be a blessing to the entire family and that those who have gone before us will be interceding and watching over this sweet baby each step of the way.

Pope Francis speaks about the communion of saints at his general audience on Wednesday, Oct. 30 at the Vatican:

Father James Martin, S.J. talks about “My Life with the Saints”