

The Vigil of All Saints

While many people were handing out candy and going to parties Oct. 31, I went to a very special service at my parish, SS Philip and James - The Vigil of All Saints.

Now, I am a fan of Halloween. I think it's fun to see people try to scare each other, watch scary movies and hand out candy to costumed kids. I also like to watch the historical documentaries that pop up around this time on the origins of the holiday and other things related to Halloween and being scared.

What we don't see much of in regular TV is any talk about what happens the next day - All Saints' Day. Well, if you're watching one of those documentaries on the origins of Halloween traditions, you'll hear the small segment on how the Church converted many pagan holidays to Christian holidays. You'll also hear that Halloween is October 31st because of an existing pagan holiday regarding the dead. And from this, comes our All Saints' Day.

A Holy Day of Obligation, All Saints' Day helps us remember the lives of the saints and our own call to holiness and sainthood.

But what do you do on a Vigil of All Saints?

SS Philip and James is blessed to be staffed by Dominican Friars of the St. Joseph Province. We get to hear from many different priests and brothers and celebrate in their traditions. The Vigil of All Saints is one of them.

The Vigil of All Saints began as a special Halloween night Vigil honoring all the saints at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. in 1998 and this year is its first appearance in Baltimore.

The vigil is by candlelight with relics of saints on the altar. We heard four readings about St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Augustine, St. Lucy, and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. Then, after a reflection by Dominican Father John Paul Walker, we were able to participate in Compline (Night Prayer) with traditional Dominican chanting

followed by a candle lit procession around the church while reciting the Litany of the Saints. It was beautiful and something I hope to do each year. Relics on display were from St. Peregrine, St. Dominic, St. Albert the Great, St. Therese of the Child Jesus, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. John Neumann, Pope St. Pius X, and a splinter from the True Cross.

What I take away most from the vigil and the celebration of All Saints' Day is that we are all called to be saints using the gifts God has given us. Because we are all different, there will never be another St. Teresa of Avila, but there are people today who will be the saints of tomorrow.

There are hundreds of saints, more than each day in the year, and it's important to find saints we can relate to so we know that through our difficulties in life, it is still possible to live a holy life and do God's work. That's a relief since none of us is perfect! So for me, and I hope for you as well, as Dominican Father David Mott, reminded us at Mass, I want to do as the old song says, "Oh Lord I want to be in that number when the saints go marching in!"



Dominican Father Paul Walker explains relics to visitors. (Wendy Stewart)