



THE YEAR OF  
**DISCIPLESHP**

## What is the Origin of All Saints Day?

Both the Feast of All Saints and the Feast of All Souls evolved in the life of the Church independently of paganism and Halloween.

Let us first address the Feast of All Saints. The exact origins of this celebration are uncertain, although, after the legalization of Christianity in 313, a common commemoration of the saints, especially the martyrs, appeared in various areas throughout the Church. For instance in the East, the city of Edessa celebrated this feast on May 13; the Syrians, on the Friday after Easter; and the city of Antioch, on the first Sunday after Pentecost. Both St. Ephrem (d. 373) and St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) attest to this feast day in their preaching. In the West, a commemoration for all the saints also was celebrated on the first Sunday after Pentecost. The primary reason for establishing a common feast day was because of the desire to honor the great number of martyrs, especially during the persecution of Emperor Diocletion (284-305), the worst and most extensive of the persecutions. Quite simply, there were not enough days of the year for a feast day for each martyr and many of them died in groups. A common feast day for all saints, therefore, seemed most appropriate.

The designation of November 1 as the Feast of All Saints occurred over time. Pope Gregory III (731-741) dedicated an oratory in the original St. Peter's Basilica in honor of all the saints on November 1 (at least according to some accounts), and this date then became the official date for the celebration of the Feast of All Saints in Rome.

Along with the Feast of All Saints developed the Feast of All Souls. The Church has consistently encouraged the offering of prayers and Mass for the souls of the faithful departed in Purgatory. At the time of their death, these souls are not perfectly cleansed of venial sin or have not atoned for past transgressions, and thereby are deprived of the Beatific Vision. The faithful on earth can assist these souls in Purgatory in attaining the Beatific Vision through their prayers, good works, and the offering of Mass.

In the early days of the Church, the names of the faithful departed were posted in Church so that the community would remember them in prayer. Other customs have arisen over time in the celebration of All Souls Day. The Dominicans in the fifteenth century instituted a custom of each priest offering three Masses on the Feast of All Souls. Pope Benedict XIV in 1748 approved this practice, and it rapidly spread throughout Spain, Portugal, and Latin America. Other customs have developed regarding All Souls. In Mexico, relatives make garlands, wreaths, and crosses of paper flowers of every color to place on the graves of deceased relatives the morning of All Souls. The family will spend the entire day at the cemetery. The pastor will visit the cemetery, preach and offer prayers for the dead, and then bless the individual graves.

All Souls Day as well as All Saints Day are rooted in Christian belief and arose in the life of the Church through a healthy spirituality.