

31st October 2023

Scared

"Scared out of his seven senses."

Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*

Halloween is a holiday celebrated each year on October 31st. The tradition originated with the ancient Celtic festival of *Samhain* when people would light bonfires and wear costumes to ward off ghosts. In the eighth century, Pope Gregory III designated November 1st as a time to honour all saints – and we'll come to that tomorrow. But soon, All Saints Day began to incorporate some of the traditions of *Samhain*.

The evening before was known as "All Hallows Eve", our Halloween. Over time, Halloween evolved into a day of activities: carving jack-o-lanterns; festive gatherings; donning costumes; eating treats; "guising" in Scotland; "trick-or-treat" activities in the US. For many, it was a time to scare off evil spirits or ghosts so that "all saints" could have their day.

So here's a thing ... When one of my daughters was in Primary School, a great deal was made of Halloween – turnip lanterns (pumpkins weren't common back then), witches' costumes, broomsticks, low-lighting, ghosts, scaring one another, even "goth-type" makeup. OK! It was fun. There was the potential of nightmares for the kids with all the ghosts and witchery stuff. But "it's expected", the teacher told me.

Yet why did the same teacher – with the acquiescence of the school management, it would appear – decline to allow explorations of the Easter story with the children because – and I quote – "The crucifixion, thorny crown, tombs, and all of that, is *much* too scary for children of this age." *Doh!* Didn't she see the double-standard – the hypocrisy, even – in encouraging an engagement with ghosts and witches (including delighting in the children being "scared out of [their] seven senses") and not engaging with the Easter narrative? Or am I being too cynical in suggesting that it was a convenient way of ducking out of an uncomfortable issue, one that the teacher herself wanted to avoid?

You decide. Is Halloween important, however it's explored, or are there other things which might be more important for children to be learning about and involved with – that are nowhere *near* as scary?

A prayer for today

Having fun? Dressing up? Playing games? Singing songs? Yes!

Ghosts? Being scared? Darkness? Witchery? No thank you.