

**Feast of All Saints • 11-1-18**  
***SURROUNDED BY LOVING SPIRITS***

On an episode of "House Hunters" on HGTV (the Home and Garden Network) newlyweds Chris and Amanda were living in Natick, Massachusetts, near Boston. Ready to start a family, they've decided to buy a home. The husband Chris loves the cultural ambiance of the quaint New England town and the rich historical past of the area around Boston. His parents live nearby in a home that was built over two hundred years ago. Amanda, on the other hand, wants brand new construction. Even something built ten years ago is too old, and a Victorian home, she says, would make her skin crawl, especially if there's a possibility that the house is haunted. Everyplace she turns, as they're checking out the older house the realtor shows them, she expects to see ghosts appear. She wants no part of it. (I didn't catch the ending, so I don't know whose choice won out.)

Although we don't hear that much about ghosts in our western world except at Halloween and some TV series, many cultures and religions have an inordinate fear of the dead; they're akin to evil spirits. The Ghost Festival is held during the seventh month of the Chinese calendar. During this month, they say the gates of hell are opened up and ghosts are free to roam the earth where they seek food and entertainment.

These spirits are believed to be ancestors of those who forgot to pay tribute to them after they died, or those who were never given a proper ritual send-off. They're coming back to get even. They have long needle-thin necks because their family hasn't fed them. Family members pay tribute to the wandering ghosts so that

these homeless souls don't intrude on their lives and bring misfortune.

A large feast is held for the ghosts on the fourteenth day of the seventh month, when people bring samples of food and place them on an offering table to please the ghosts and ward off bad luck.



In Taiwan during the ghost month, people even avoid surgery, buying cars, swimming, and going out after dark. It's also important for them that addresses are not revealed to the ghosts. Incense and food are offered to the spirits to avoid them visiting their homes. Nobody wants them around.

In ancient Rome over two thousand years ago at the festival of Lemuralia it was the custom to appease or expel the evil spirits. Their incantation was: "*Ghosts of my fathers and ancestors, be gone!*" What a contrast to our Catholic faith and tradition of inviting the ancestors and saints to be with us. We want St. Anthony to help us our lost keys and St. Christopher to guide our journeys and the Blessed Virgin to embrace us with her motherly love. Our traditional Catholic prayer for our beloved dead brings comfort and consolation. *Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.* The spirits who surround us, this Communion of Saints, are our friends and allies. We want them to come to our homes. They intercede for us before God and our lives are enriched by their example of faithful love. These spirits are

not only the official saints we honor, like Perpetua and Francis de Sales, John XXIII and Oscar Romero.



All Saints includes the countless unnamed men and women, young and old, of every age and generation and walk of life, who have lived their lives faithful to God, usually in quiet and unassuming ways. These are the ordinary people who had an uncommon talent for doing ordinary things extraordinarily well. They wait to welcome us into eternity and they encourage us on our journey. They are our friends “friends in high places.”

Although we don’t know what eternity will be like, and we can’t speak descriptively about the afterlife, we have assurance from the scriptures, the very Word of God, that something marvelous awaits us. The Letter of John today tells us: *Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like God, for we shall see God as he is.* On this Christian Feast of All Saints and tomorrow’s Feast of All Souls, it’s good for us to meditate on how we understand and try to live our faith in eternal life. For me, to believe in heaven is to refuse to accept that the life of all and of each one of us is just a small parenthesis between two immense empty spaces. Relying on Jesus, I sense, feel, desire and believe that God is leading toward its true fullness our desire for life, justice and peace that is within creation and the heart of humanity.

I want that the last will someday be first and that the tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the Kingdom before us. I want to know the true saints of all religions and of all kinds of believers and non-believers, those doubters who spent their lives loving anonymously, expecting nothing. I want us all to be a part of the grand vision described in the Book of Revelation: *a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue... standing before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hand... crying out in a loud voice: “Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb.”*



One day we’ll be able to hear these fantastic words that Revelation proclaims and the promise which John’s epistle offers that we shall be “like God.” The assurance of the Beatitudes will be ours: *Rejoice and be glad; yours is the Kingdom of God.* So, to all of us and to everyone: *Happy Feast Day!* This is the day to be who you have been called to be: a child of God... an heir to God’s Kingdom... a saint among the Saints.

*John Kasper, OSFS*