



Parish Information Bulletin

Program for 20—26 OCTOBER 2024

SUNDAY 20 OCTOBER
St Gerasimos of Cephalonia

- **6TH SUNDAY OF LUKE, Luke 8: 26-39**
• **7.30am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

2024 SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES

(A free voluntary program organised by the Church)

Lessons take place in the building behind the church and begin at 10.30am until Church dismissal.

We have classes for ages ranging from 5yrs to teenage years. Lessons are taught in a relaxed, friendly environment.

Please bring your children along to learn of their rich Orthodox faith and come close to God and His Love.

MONDAY 21 OCTOBER

- **9.00am**
Service of Holy Unction
- **10.00am**
Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall

WEDNESDAY 23 OCTOBER

- **5.00pm**
Paraklesis to the Theotokos

THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER

★ **TEENAGE YOUTH GROUP**

(In Church Hall upstairs behind Church)

ALL TEENAGERS WELCOME

In Church Coffee Room on side of the Church

SATURDAY 26 OCTOBER
St Demetrios, Great-Martyr

- **7.30am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

SUNDAY 27 OCTOBER

GOSPEL READING: Luke 8: 41-56
EPISTLE READING: 2Corinthians 9: 6-11

Telephone Contact Numbers

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Fr Athanasios and Fr Ephraim are available at the Church every Monday to Friday between 4.00 and 6.00pm for Holy Confession and any spiritual need.

Saint Demetrios, The Myrrh-Streamer Apolytikion

The world has found in you a great champion in time of peril, as you emerged the victor in routing the barbarians. For as you brought to naught the boasts of Lyaïos, imparting courage to Nestor in the stadium, in like manner, holy one, great Martyr Demetrios, invoke Christ God for us, that He may grant us His great mercy.

Should Orthodox Christians Celebrate Halloween?

Many Orthodox Christian parents often wonder what the boundaries are when it comes to celebrating Halloween. Is it okay for our children to participate in certain things and not others? Must we “ban” Halloween altogether? Or does none of it matter to begin with? Each Orthodox Christian must employ discernment

WHAT IS HALLOWEEN?

Depending on the context, the word Halloween could either refer to a Christian definition or a pagan one. In the Christian context, **Halloween** is short for “All Hallows’ Eve,” the evening before the Western feast day of All Saints. **Hallow** is an old-fashioned word for Holy (Saint), and **E’en** is short for evening. Halloween began sometime during the episcopate of Pope Gregory III (731 – 741 AD), who dedicated an oratory in the original Saint Peter’s Basilica of Rome in honour of all the Saints on November 1st. Before this time, the Church celebrated the feast of All Saints either in April or May, commemorating the Martyrs. In Western Christianity, All Saints’ Day therefore falls on November 1st, and thus Halloween on October 31st. However, in the Orthodox Church, we celebrate All Saints’ Day the Sunday after Pentecost, which typically falls somewhere in late spring (May, June).

In the pagan context, Halloween refers to the observance of several dubious practices. These include trick-or-treating (requesting treats and harassing those who did not give), carving of jack-o-lanterns, and dressing in costume as ghosts, witches, vampires, and the like. For the purposes of this article, we are discussing whether or not Orthodox Christians should participate in the pagan traditions of Halloween.

THE ORIGINS OF HALLOWEEN DON'T MATTER

Most people who engage in the debate about whether Orthodox Christians should celebrate Halloween tend to focus on

the origins of this holiday. We would posit, however, that origin ultimately doesn't matter. The true issue is the way in which Halloween is celebrated today...what these practices mean and communicate to our children, and whether it is spiritually harmful to them if they engage in these activities.

"HALLOWEEN IS HARMLESS FUN!"

While many of the current practices of Halloween may have had their roots in paganism, many parents will object and say, "Well, that was true at *one time*, but *now* Halloween is just a time for kids to dress up, get candy, and enjoy themselves." We may think Halloween does no harm. However, we must remember there are invisible realities beyond what our eyes can see. And when we act without discernment, we often invite demons into our hearts and minds. In *any other context*, why would we take the chance of letting a demon into our heart? What makes celebrating Halloween the exception in the minds of most Orthodox Christians?

Often, it is the desire for our children not to feel left out. We justify participation in spiritually harmful activities because we want our children to "fit in". We forget that we are not *meant* to fit in with this world. Moreover, parents tend to underestimate their children and their understanding of God and Satan, right and wrong. Yes, your children may be disappointed having to pass up Halloween. But they will emerge from it with a profound sense of their Christian identity, able to stand up against the things that go against their Faith.

As parents, we should not actively encourage the normalization of evil and demonic things in our children's lives. Even if our children dress in something innocuous, they are surrounded by others dressed as monsters, killers, demons, and witches. We do everything in our power to protect our children from the horrors of the world and want them to be pious Christians, yet we find it morally permissible to subject them to these horrors ourselves under the guise of "fun" and "fitting in".

WHAT SHOULD WE DO ON HALLOWEEN?

In every Liturgy, the priest prays several times: "Let us commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God." We can take a step toward healing society, our families, and our children by commending Halloween to the care of our Ever-present God. This means removing anything ungodly from the celebration and keeping Christ and His Saints at the centre. Speak with your parish priest about celebrating a Vespers and Paraklesis on October 31st, to pray together for the world. And at home, plan wholesome non-Halloween activities for your children.

WHAT ABOUT HALLOWEEN IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

The education of our children is primarily our business as their parents, not the school board's, administration's, or teachers'. Chances are, there are other parents in your district (Orthodox or not) who don't care for these Halloween activities either. If enough of you get together and ask for a change, changes can happen.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9 IS THE PERFECT LITMUS TEST

Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report....meditate on these things...and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:8-9

When we think to engage in any sort of activity, we must set it up against this "litmus test" from Saint Paul. Celebrating Halloween may be "fun" under proper supervision; however, it lacks significantly in the attributes laid out for Orthodox Christians in the Scriptures.

"Whatever things are true" excludes the goblins, witches, vampires and all the spooky fantasies that characterize Halloween. This could also apply to Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, arguably.

"Whatever things are noble." We and our children are a royal priesthood, raised to honour ourselves with self-respect and dignity. How is dressing them in grotesque costumes that frighten others, noble? How is it dignified to be scared and humiliated by the things they would see while trick-or-treating? To be dignified, decent, and polite is the attribute of one made in the image of God. *"Whatever things are pure."* We are all baptized into a holiness that is spiritually protected by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. But we must choose to keep ourselves pure, free from all that is wrong, wicked, wild and worthless. Temptations will come and it is difficult, but not impossible, to preserve them from surrendering to the forces of iniquity.

"Whatever things are lovely." When it comes to Halloween, this one is quite obvious! Halloween is all about macabre, grotesque ugliness and gore.

"Meditate on these things and the God of peace will be with you." Think about these things, not just as a vague ideal, but consider how to instil such virtues into our children, their families, and our Church.

WE FIGHT A SPIRITUAL WAR AGAINST DEMONS EVERY DAY

Evil is very real, and demons exist. Christ came into the world so that, through death, He might destroy him that had the dominion of death, that is, the Devil (Hebrews 2:14). Christians must see that our greatest foe is the Evil One who inspires nations and individuals to sin, and who keeps them from coming to the Truth. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). Dressing up as devils, monsters, witches, or wizards – even as a joke – is spiritually dangerous. Because we are making fun of something deeply serious and real. Evil is not a joke, nor should it be taken lightly.

<https://www.saintjohnchurch.org>

A Brief Word on Halloween (as to whether you ought to participate or not)

- Excerpt from a letter of Archimandrite Irenei to a mother and father.

We know that the actions of our bodies, and the things we do with our lives, affect our hearts and are directly connected to spiritual realms of which we are, on account of our weakness, not always immediately aware. Can you honestly think—you who gaze at and touch the holy icons in your home and in our temples, and know that the saints are present with you, and that you are drawn into their holy lives—that to be willingly surrounded by images of the demons (however childish and infantile their representation) will not also affect your heart, and your children's hearts, and draw them closer to powers that none would call holy? And not just to gaze upon such images, but to fashion them into clothes and costumes and wear them on one's body?

<https://www.orthodoxethos.com>