

As Halloween approaches, what is the Church's view on witches, vampires, etc. as portrayed in popular culture (Halloween costumes, Harry Potter, etc.). Should kids (adults) read and/or watch these form of entertainment?

Halloween, a contraction for All Hallowed Evening, started as a Catholic feast celebrating the vigil of All Saints Day. Together with All Saints Day (Nov. 1st) and All Souls Day (Nov. 2nd) it is a celebration of the Communion of Saints; a time for us still on earth to pray to the saints in heaven for their intercession, and a time to pray for the poor souls in purgatory. Unfortunately, Halloween in current society seems to be focused mainly on things that are evil, instead of things that are holy.

In the Catechism, the Church's teaching is clear when it comes to witchcraft and sorcery. *"All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future."* (CCC #2116) *"All practices of magic or sorcery, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others - even if this were for the sake of restoring their health - are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion."* (CCC #2117)

These are the facts, but when it comes to applying them to today's question, there are a variety of interpretations. My own *personal opinion* is that it becomes a question of intent. Does a child who wears a ghost or witch costume do so for fun, or with the intention of communicating with spirits, practicing magic, or glorifying evil? Does the teen who reads Harry Potter read for the excitement of the story, or to learn about witchcraft with a desire to cast spells, to "tame occult powers"? This is where parental supervision is important; only parents can make judgments for their children about what they should wear on Halloween or what they should read. Do your children know about purgatory and hell? Do they know the realities and dangers of witchcraft?

As I look back at all the fairy tales from when I was a child, I remember many examples of witches and magic. Jack had his magic beans that grew into the giant bean stalk. The witches cast spells on Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, and the good fairies helped out Cinderella. I enjoyed reading the Lord of the Rings trilogy which is filled with magic and wizards and evil spirits. I must admit that I haven't read any of the Harry Potter books, but I did see the first two movies with my family. I personally found them to be good entertainment, and nothing more.

Deacon Joe