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H A L L O W – E E N & Día de los Muertos By Most Rev. James A. Tamayo, Bishop of the Diocese of Laredo

As a young boy, I would walk home from school each day with my sister. My grandfather, who lived with us, would greet us at the door since our parents would still be at work. I fondly remember my grandfather sitting my sister and me at the kitchen table with an after-school snack he had prepared for us. Grandpa would begin each afternoon by telling us a story about a family member. Without revealing any names at the start of each tale, he would say: “There was once a little boy,” or “there was once a little girl”; and the story would unfold with many details. At the conclusion, he would ask, “And who do you think that little boy (or that little girl) was?” My sister and I would begin to guess: “It’s Daddy!” “It’s Tío Esteban!” “It’s Tía Consuelo,” or “It’s our cousin Robert!” We delighted in learning about Mom and Dad, aunts, uncles, cousins and other extended family members through this simple practice of storytelling.

Similarly, Día de los Muertos, a culturally rich tradition in Laredo, is a day to remember our loved ones. As we reflect on our family members who have passed away, we often share stories and special memories of their life. In the Catholic Church, this day is known as All Souls’ Day (November 2nd). Members of Catholic parishes across the world pray that all of the souls that have left this earth will be united with God in Heaven. Remembering the dead – and praying for their salvation – is not just a nice ritual, but it helps us call to mind our own mortality and the need to live a life centered on God.

All Saints’ Day (November 1st) – the day before All Souls’ Day – is dedicated to remembering the holy men and women who, with great faith, daily imitated the virtues of Christ’s life. Traditionally, All Saints’ Day festivities begin on All Hallows’ Eve. The word “hallow” means “holy,” and a shortened version of “evening” – “e’een” – make up the word H a l l o w - e e n. People of faith commemorate All Saints’ Day by dressing up in costumes reflective of the clothing the Saints wore in their lifetime as a way to honor them. In recent times, the celebration of All Saints’ Day has become somewhat misunderstood and overshadowed in society. Thus, some modern-day Halloween celebrations have lost the true meaning of All Hallows’ Eve through the use of secular costumes which have become gorier, and at times, immodest. The roots of Halloween can be traced back to honoring the lives of the Saints.

If we allow the true meaning of All Hallows’ Eve to guide our festivities, and costumes do not glorify evil by being inappropriate in any manner, it is perfectly okay to have fun on this day while also honoring the Saints who, throughout their lives, honored God. Given the pandemic, it is important to note that in whatever way you choose to commemorate All Saints’ Day and Día de los Muertos, you do so in a safe way maintaining proper health protocols.

I pray that you have safe and joyous celebrations... **TODO CON AMOR!**