

## An Alternative Family Halloween

by Josh Noem

Halloween 2014 had all the markings of a disaster in our town last year: snow was falling and the wind was gusting up to 45 mph.

Our family looked out the window and decided to throw in the towel. Oscar was getting too old for trick-or-treating, anyway, and Simon and Lucy are too temperate to risk pneumonia for some Tootsie Rolls and Sweet-n-Sours. We did want to mark the holiday with a fun family outing, so we decided to go to a movie, and allowed the kids to pick out their own theater candy. We saw the new animated feature, *The Book of Life*.

There are moments in family life when a plan goes terribly, terribly wrong—that happens often, and is good fodder for blog posts for us. But occasionally, there are also moments when everything clicks to produce a beautiful experience. Thanks to this film, our alternative Halloween was one of these beautiful experiences.

The story for the movie has to do with the Latino tradition of the Day of the Dead (el Día de los Muertos), which draws upon the feasts of All Saints and All Souls in the Church to celebrate the communion of saints. The plot line has characters entering the afterlife in pursuit of love, encountering deceased family members, and confronting evil. It was a funny, exciting, and beautiful film.

Most of all, though, it was a thoroughly Christian film, even though the only overtly religious figures—a priest and some nuns—served as only background characters. The characters moved through a Christian world in the presentation of death and the afterlife. Finding deceased loved ones in the “land of the remembered” was the ultimate fiesta, for example, and this

communion of love beyond death colored everything—it freed the main character to live fully and authentically and fearlessly.

We all came out of the film uplifted, and the experience utterly recast the feast of All Hallows’ Eve for us. Halloween has its origin as the vigil for the great feast of All Saints (“all hallowed” refers to “all the holy ones”), so I was very grateful to avoid all the zombies and superheroes wandering the streets in search of free candy, and instead consider death through the lens of faith and love.

After the movie, we used the opportunity to call to mind those in our own family who are in the “land of the remembered.” We had the kids recall the grandparents they have known who have passed, and Stacey and I spoke about the grandparents who we remember, but who died before the kids could get to know them. We even recalled two special lives in our own family who were lost to miscarriage—it was a nice moment for the children to call to mind their siblings who are still a part of our family, even though we cannot see them with us now.

November is a good time to turn our minds to the end of things. The natural world is passing away before us in preparation for winter—trees are diminishing before our very eyes and even the daylight is dying slowly. Soon it will be time to recall the source of our hope and to prepare, through Advent, for his coming into our lives. But for now, we remember the faithful departed, and draw courage from our communion with them and the continuity of life beyond death.