

A Look at ‘Undas’: Observing All Saints’ Day in the Philippines

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For Catholics around the world, the proper day to visit dead loved ones in the cemeteries is the 2nd of November or what is now more commonly called the All Souls’ Day. In Mexico and certain parts of Latin America, a public observance known as *Dia de los Muertos* is conducted from October 31 to November 1. The Philippines, being a predominantly Catholic nation, follows a similar tradition in the form of *undás* or Philippine All Saints’ Day. So how is the undas tradition in the Philippines observed? Here are some facts you need to know.

Undas Tradition or All Saints’ Day in the Philippines

Like the many [Philippine traditions](#) Filipinos observe in their daily lives, on November 1, All Saints’ Day or undas is a day to remember the departed. Filipinos customarily visit the tombs and graves of their deceased family members. They often spend a good part of the day repairing these tombs and cleaning them. Some families even spend the night around their loved ones’ tombs, passing the long hours of the evening by playing card games, eating, drinking alcohol, and singing. Prayers are also offered this day as well as a novena in thirteen Roman Catholic churches in the Philippines.



When the Novena is over, there is a mass migration from the church to the cemetery. Though the primary focus is to remember the dead, undas is hardly a solemn event. Here are some of the common activities that Pinoys do as part of the undas tradition in the Philippines.

Cultural Practices Observed During Undas

1. *Pista Minatay* or sharing meals with departed loved ones



Offering food to their departed loved ones and other spirits is a very vital part of the undas tradition in the Philippines. It coincides with similar practices done around the world, such as the Hungry Ghost Festival celebrated in China and Hong Kong every August.

2. Preparing the deceased loved one's favorite dish



For undas, some Filipino families cook the departed one's favorite dish. So don't be surprised when moms and *titas* are busy the night before cooking the favorite food of your late family members!

3. Prayers, the rosary, and novena

Aside from those who have entered the Kingdom of Heaven, All Saints' Day is a day of prayer for all saints recognized by the Catholic Church. A rosary is offered together with prayers for the departed.

4. Some cemeteries prohibit eating



This may sound a bit contradictory to the traditions some people observe on undas, but other families have strictly prohibited food within the cemetery premises. It is part of the belief that day of the dead should be a somber observance of their passing, not something that the living should enjoy.

5. No stepping over a grave or tombstone



Whether it's All Saints' Day or not, stepping on a tombstone or a grave is disrespectful to the dead. Years of bad luck is believed to fall upon those who violate this rule. This practice is regarded as more of a superstition than a tradition.

6. Walking over a bonfire smoke



Though this isn't as common in urban areas as it is in provinces, walking over a bonfire is one cultural tradition still observed until today. Children are often advised to walk over a bonfire smoke so bad spirits won't follow them when they leave the cemetery.

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