

Araw ng mga Patay

November 1 majority of the Filipino population observe All Saint's Day (Araw ng mga Patay). During the Araw ng mga Patay Filipinos remember their dead, clean the graves, and decorate them with flowers. While the purpose is somber, the effect is a picnic, full of merrymaking and laughter. Everyone goes to the cemetery, and some even stay overnight.

All Soul's Day Special

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The onset of All Soul's Day in places where the inhabitants are mostly Catholics suggests a deluging in the local markets of assorted candles of colors, shapes and scents and of a variety of flowers freshly picked from a native farm. The hullabaloo in the flea markets reached as far as the super marts and department stores where people can be seen hurrying to and fro, doing a last minute buying of the things they will need in preparing for the occasion. Such a typical Filipino setting indeed and so much like Christmas Eve, the difference is it's not Christmas and it's not for the living. It is All Soul's Day and it's for the dead.

This tradition goes back to ancient years and as history repeats itself so too this popular wont had been passed to one generation after another. But what really is the celebration of All Soul's Day? Do other religious sects have their All Soul's Day celebration? An informal interview was conducted to make way for the beliefs and traditions maintained by different religious sects. Read on...

Catholics make way for the All Soul's Day

Popularly identified as "All Soul's Day", this is the day set apart in the Roman Catholic Church for the commemoration of the souls of the faithful dead. It falls on the 2nd of November albeit in this country, most Filipinos celebrated it as early as November 1. The tradition is said to have started in the 10th and 11th centuries and was based on the (Catholic) doctrine that "prayers of the faithful on earth may help purify souls in purgatory". The offering of prayers and masses are solely for the repose of the souls who died not in the state of grace. Prayers and masses are offered to ease whatever pain and suffering they are in. To complement to such thoughtful cause, loved ones offer a spray of flowers and lighted candles. Flowers serve as a living memory reminding us that once these people had remained close to us and they, like us, had once been fascinated by the beauty and color of life. Lighted candles likewise signify that the love, hope and joy they shared with people they had left behind shall be kept forever burning and alive even though they may have found their destiny somewhere or even in the arms of the Heavenly Father.

In a Muslim's way

"Hindi kami naniniwala sa "Araw ng mga Patay", replied Salem Malako, a Muslim residing in one small Muslim community seated somewhere Brgy. Concepcion, Naga City, when ask if Muslims believe in the so-called All Soul's Day celebration. He went on to relate that in their religion which is Islam, "Ang kamatayan ay ang katapusan...at hindi na namin inaalala ang mga namatay." (Death is the end and we do not keep remembrance of the dead.) Salem and his other companion, Said, went on to illustrate, while citing some teachings from the Koran, that those who died were like on a deep slumber.

Malako and Said's illustration of the burial customs in Islam suggested that traditional Islamic burials are carried on conservatively. Initially, the corpse is bathe and cleanse and thereafter wrapped in a soft white cloth. It shall be allowed a three-day stay in the house for family members, relatives and friends to pay a quick visit. Forbidden activities include that of gambling or playing similar games and eating. A too intense expression of sorrow like lamenting and mourning is much forbidden for the main reason that "nahihirapan ang patay.", as was quickly interposed by Salem Malako during my interview bout. When asked why a family member or a relative or a friend perhaps cannot grieve for the dead, Salem simply told me "dahil ang buhay ay pinahiram lang naman". An answer which in all fairness has every speck of truth in them.

After the initial preparation and three-day stay in the house, the final step is the burying of the corpse. A cave is exhumed and the corpse is placed underneath. No flowers nor candles adorned the graveyard. The dearly departed carried with him nothing but a simple clothing wrapped around him. His personal belongings, which are to be later on donated to others, are retained by the family members.

Upon the death of the person, two angels named Monkar and Nakher stood before the dead person and judged him based on his past conducts and acts. Unlike Catholics, Muslims oppose the existence of a purgatory. For the Muslims, it's either "Paraiso" (Heaven) or "Impierno" (Hell). The "paraiso" has eight (8) levels while the "impierno" has only seven (7) levels and where a person may go depends upon the actions he had done during his past life.

Notions and Beliefs of other Sects

"Sa abo ka hale, sa abo ka man mabalik". A biblical statement which affirms the very reason why Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC) followers do not believe in the celebration of the All Soul's Day.

Iglesia Ni Cristo or the Church of Christ, another known religious denomination in the country, has quite a different explanation on why they do not share the special celebration of the All Soul's Day. Such explanation is in accordance with some Biblical teachings and doctrines that man's origin is from dust and from it he shall return. This is further exemplified through their belief that man is composed of three (3) parts: hawak (body), espiritu(spirit) and kalag(soul). The body being the one visible and living in this world while the soul is considered, termed in the local vernacular as the, "hinangos kan tao" (breath of man) which man only borrows from God.

INC followers believed that when a person dies, he is but on a deep sleep so that he is no longer aware of the things that are made in his favor. The offering of prayers, masses and indulgences, according to INC tradition, will not likely benefit the dead because a person's destination, be it heaven or hell, depends on how he conducted his life while he was still living.

Contrary to the popular belief of the Catholics that after a person's demise, he shall be judge according to his past doings, INC advocates do not share such idea. Rather, they cited "Hindi babangon ang mga patay kundi sa araw ng paghukom ni Cristo" (in bicol vernacular), a specific biblical statement which attested to this disparity.

Sharing the same biblical foundation as INC does, followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses likewise do not share the celebration of All Soul's Day. For them, no specific biblical teaching can prove out the existence of the All Soul's Day celebration.

Chinese Customs on the All Soul's Day

Chinese traditions on the celebration of All Soul's Day have some similarities like those of the Catholics. Floral offerings, fruits, and other foodstuffs are being offered to the souls, believing that they (souls) too share in that simple feast. Two sticks of Chinese "incense", instead of candles, are lighted for the souls while three are said to be offered to God. Material possessions, in the form of paper-made "playhouse", "car" and "kim" (Chinese money) are made available to the dead person's tomb intending prosperity for the departed souls.

I am a devout Catholic and I believe in the celebration of the All Soul's Day. On those two days of my interview stint, I had gone to places I had not been before. I had set foot on grounds that were unfamiliar to me. And a whole lot of truths, which I respected, are known and revealed to me making me realize then, as a person, that regardless of what you believe into, one truth remains, that we, humans, are but destined to only one - to our Creator.

And for me as a Catholic, All Soul's Day is not about ghosts, eeriness or cold gray air. All Soul's Day is more than the floral offerings, lighting of candles, praying or visiting the graveyard of our dearly departed. Perhaps, the celebration of the All Soul's Day is also an opportune time for living ones to ponder on to their life's mission while they are still on earth.

source: <http://www.camarinessur.gov.ph/sec/life/allsouls.php>

Ref.: http://www.seasite.niu.edu/Tagalog/Cynthia/festivals/all_saints_day.htm

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Reasons why All Saint's Day in the Philippines is better than Thanksgiving in the US

1. You're not obliged to serve turkey, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie to your family and they can't complain if you just hand them out *kornik* and *kropek*.
2. You get to hang out in the cemetery.
3. There's no football here so you won't miss anything if you go to the cemetery.
4. Family reunions--deceased members included.
5. You think you're in Lollapalooza when you reach the cemetery except that instead of rock and roll, you hear cheesy, *bakya* music, Britney Spears, the current hits remade into dance tunes or some drunk man singing off-key to a karaoke song.
6. Collecting candle drops so you can either sell them or use them to wax your floor.
7. We have none of that "I'm so thankful for yada-yada-yada" crap those crappy Americans are so full of; heck Erap's already a handful.
8. You get to hit on girls/guys in the cemetery and people won't think you're some sort of sick weirdo.
9. You've always wanted to have a picnic in an exotic place, well here's your chance; the local memorial park's waiting for you.
10. You don't have to be actually thankful for anything.

source: <http://www.angelfire.com/sc/synthesis/10arc0.html>

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