

FROM THE DESK OF FATHER MURASSO

Shed the Pumpkin in Yourself, Become a Jack-O-Lantern

One of the most beautiful times of the year has arrived. Autumn has come perhaps a bit later than last year, but needless to say in some parts of Connecticut autumn has arrived making its usual ostentatious and flamboyant appearance. It has been an especially welcoming sight this year, perhaps because in the midst of America's preoccupation with terrorism and war, nature has provided us with a momentary reprieve from our daily fears and anxieties. God has gifted our souls with a spiritual respite by providing us with a serene yet spectacular pageantry of color.

Autumn this year appears to have ushered in a message of peace in the midst of pandemonium, hope in the midst of despair, faith in the midst of doubt, and trust in the midst of uncertainty. There is something quite tranquil in the burst of colors that dance against the sky, the array of velvety chrysanthemums which appear to be in abundance this year along with my favorite, the Jack-O-Lantern. The Jack-O-Lantern is more than a decoration reminding us of the festivities associated with the celebration of Halloween and Thanksgiving. The Jack-O-Lantern speaks to us of an inner beauty that each of us possess. In its unpretentious and simple presence, the Jack-O-Lantern touches our souls as it unconsciously draws us into its inner beauty; a beauty that is illuminated by the light that burns within.

There is a folktale about a man named Jack. According to the tale, Jack wasn't a very pleasant individual. As a matter of fact, Jack was thought to be a miserly, cantankerous and overall, a rather disagreeable old man. The time came for Jack to die, however neither God nor the devil wanted any part of poor old Jack. God maintained that throughout his lifetime numerous opportunities were extended to Jack to change his ways, but he refused. In addition, the devil claimed that throughout Jack's life he continuously played practical jokes on him, therefore, the thought of Jack spending eternity with him was quite out of the question. Consequently, Jack was forced to roam the earth swinging a yellow lantern. It's not clear what Jack was supposed to be doing as he roamed the earth, perhaps he was meant to be a reminder to the rest of humanity about such virtues as kindness, honesty and goodness. In any case, the Jack-O-Lantern was born and over time has been associated with the underworld.

In pre-Christian times, it was believed that on the last day of October both good and evil spirits roamed the earth. The Jack-O-Lantern, with its toothy smile was placed in windows and stationed on doorsteps with the belief that those spirits who roamed the earth in the dark of night would be frightened away.

Jack-O-Lanterns don't come into existence as Jack-O-Lanterns. Like human beings who begin life as infants, the Jack-O-Lantern's infancy begins as a pumpkin. I like pumpkins, not only because they contribute to the brilliant colors of autumn that resonate around us. Pumpkins also speak to me about human destiny. Just

as each of us has the potential of becoming a unique contributing adult according to our potentials, a pumpkin has the possibility of becoming much more than a mere squash. It is only after it grows into that perfect pumpkin that someone like you or me snatches it from a pumpkin patch and designates it to become much more. It becomes a Jack-O-Lantern with its own personality and its own inner beauty.

Contrary to pre-Christian thought, I don't see the Jack-O-Lantern's role in life as an object of fear. Rather I see it as a captivating and appropriate symbol for life. Thinking about this unique beauty of the Jack-O-Lantern, could it not be a very wonderful symbol for our homes year around? Perhaps our friends and relatives would think of us as being somewhat strange, yet if we take a closer look at the Jack-O-Lantern, we might be surprised just how much it could change our lives and our homes.

First, let's examine the object itself. We see an actual pumpkin. Next the insides are removed and two eyes, a nose, and a mouth are carved out, after which a candle is placed inside. As a result of this amateur kitchen operation, our pumpkin has undergone a complete transformation. From the large triangular eyes, a button nose and mouth carved in a toothy smile, a beautiful yellow light shines forth. In its simplicity, the Jack-O-Lantern signifies inner beauty and tranquility. Like you and me, each Jack-O-Lantern is created with its own unique personality, a personality that is enhanced by the inner light that emanates from within. That which appeared to be just a common run-of-the-mill pumpkin, looking like every other pumpkin, has now acquired a distinct character all its own. Our pumpkin is no longer a pumpkin; it is a Jack-O-Lantern.

As Americans, we spend billions of dollars each year in an effort to look younger and more attractive. Oils and creams, hair color and cologne, as well as the fashionable look-good-fast remedies to melt away both the pounds and the years. Yet real beauty in human beings comes not from what we apply from without, but from those qualities that emanate from within like, honesty and sincerity and compassion and love, all of which are rooted in the human soul. Like the Jack-O-Lantern, real beauty comes from the inner Light, which is God who shines through all of us to the degree that we allow Him to scoop away the seeds of doubt and anger and bitterness and hate.

The candlelight is to the Jack-O-Lantern what Jesus is to you and me. The more *yucky* stuff that is scooped out of the pumpkin, the brighter the light is that shines from within the Jack-O-Lantern. Ask yourselves, how much of God's light do you permit to shine through you? What is obstructing His light in you from shining brighter? What are some of the seeds of destruction yet to be removed that are dimming God's Light in you? Jesus is God's light.

We need to examine our lives daily. Like the pumpkin we need to allow Jesus to carve away those areas that are preventing us from becoming transformed and from permitting more of His light to shine through; thus preventing others from seeing Him in each of us. We also need to emancipate the Jack-O-Lantern, and give him a place in our homes throughout the year, and not just in autumn.