

Halloween – A Time to Pretend

Yesterday was Halloween and I had a blast. Oh, I didn't dress up and go out partying—those days are long gone—but I delighted in the children who came to the door, some one or two at a time and others almost as if in small herds. They were superheroes, pirates, princesses, butterflies and bunnies. And, to be honest, there were a number I couldn't recognize at all. When I would ask: "What are you?" there would inevitably be a quizzical look on the child's face, as if to say: "You don't know?" The children are what I enjoy most and their parents too, protectively standing in the background and vicariously reliving their own Trick or Treat experiences of not-too-long-ago through their kids.

It's all make-believe—a chance to dress up and to pretend to be something that you are not, if for only a little while. There is no harm in that. In fact, it is a wonderful respite from reality. Children are so marvelously creative, but too often our insistence that they fit into the one-size-fits-all mold, which we have cast for them, that stifles their creativity. They are expected to be at the top of the class academically, take piano and dance lessons, play soccer or baseball or football or all three, and later to letter in tennis or basketball or lacrosse, to win academic or athletic scholarships to the college of their choice, and to smile all the way through it all. They are pushed awfully hard sometimes.

It might be good for us all to pretend a little more. We live in such a busy, hard, and demanding world; some of us carry burdens that we know will never go away; we grow weary with the demands of life, work responsibilities, family crises. As one young woman told me years ago, "I'm tired of being a big girl." She had fulfilled her duty lovingly, kindly, and patiently, but it was a duty which neither she nor anyone her age should have had to shoulder. Every one of us needs time to step back from the duties and responsibilities of life, and not so much to pretend that they are not real, but to give ourselves permission and time simply to let down and to do something different for a little while. So, you don't have to dress up like a pirate or a princess—I guess you can if you want to—but give yourself a break, for heaven's sake, and help someone else take a break by offering to sit with their children or homebound spouse, or whatever. You really can't put a price on that kind of kindness.