

Hallows
An Intergenerational Service
Rev. Hannah Petrie and Pagan Guests
October 30, 2016

WORDS OF WELCOME

Good morning! And welcome to Hallows, our first Inter-generational service of the year. We are celebrating, mourning, remembering, and thus communing with our loved ones who have passed. As an inter-generational service, this is an opportunity for people of all ages to reflect on the cycles of life and to honor the wisdom of our ancestors and elders. Hallows originated as a pagan celebration of the third and final harvest of the year, when the bounty of the years growth was reaped and stored for winter, and the barrenness of the fields was acknowledged as both necessary and sacred. For much like the ebbs and flows of our lives, we cannot see new growth without clearing out the old growth, so the garden may renew itself after the shorter days have passed.

Hallows, or Samhain (SOW-in) is one of the two "spirit-nights" each year, the other being Beltane. It is a magical interval when the mundane laws of time and space are temporarily suspended, and the "Thin Veil" between the worlds is lifted. Communicating with ancestors and departed loved ones is easier at this time, as is also believed in the Mexican tradition of Day of the Dead.

So let us commence these rites – rites of honoring and remembering, rites of letting go and preparing for a time of contemplation to come in the dark season upon us.

HALLOWS RITUAL

It's time for our ritual enactment. There will be three parts to this, and you can do all three, or just one or two of them. Our weekly ritual of Joys and Sorrows is available to this side. Please select a stone and drop it in the water in witness to a joy or sorrow we carry in our hearts today. If you brought a photo or memento of a loved one, please carry it to the Hallows altar and place it among the marigolds and lights, an act that symbolizes your remembrance, and collectively honors and appreciates all the wisdom and gifts these loved ones gave to us and that live in us, as we live yet. Finally, you may also, especially if you have no item to place on the altar, write a note to a loved one who has passed and hang it on the altar tree. These notes will later be burned, unless you'd like to retrieve it after the service.

Please come forward now as you are moved to do so.

PRAYER AND SILENT MEDITATION

Today we pray to the Great Mother, the divine feminine who rules the natural world, the seasons and cycles that are reflected in our lives. Now is the time for the death dance, yet also for stillness, for ruminations, for healing – now is the time for letting go.

On Hallow's Eve, we may be visited by the dead, by profound events of long ago, or our lost loved ones, if only through memory and the feelings and thoughts that arise in our remembrance. May we treasure these little spirits as gifts, as we treasure our ancestors who gave us life, who shaped who we are as we ply our way in the world of the living.

To complete the honoring of our dead, let us now take time, within this prayer, to speak their names out loud. When I ring the bell, as you are moved to do so, please name all who you remember today . . .

To these names, to these spirits who live on in our evocations, we send our love. We hope you know how much you are missed, how much you are loved, and that you live on as we keep and share your stories.

May our healing be in our strength of character, in emulating the specific quality of integrity that we have learned from those we have loved, but lost.

In gratitude and in fullness of heart, we say, amen and blessed be.

HOMILY

I love this stanza in the poem "All Souls" by May Sarton:

*Now the dead move through all of us still glowing,
Mother and child, lover and lover mated,
Are wound and bound together and enflowing.
What has been plaited cannot be unplaited—
Only the strands grow richer with each loss
And memory makes kings and queens of us.*

It's true that our memories of our lost loved are often treasures, but it's not always the case.

So far I have spoken of the dead as if they were all saints, and so I first acknowledge that it's more complicated than that. No one we have ever loved was perfect, and some far less so, and yet, especially if it's a blood relative who has given us life, we are indebted in a fraught way. I'm thinking of my Grandpa Wells, my father's father, who was emotionally abusive to my grandma who I loved so much and died 20 years ago this April. But he wasn't all bad. I'll never forget how distraught he was when he lost my grandma; despite it all, he loved her fiercely. He was flawed, but he loved. And he gave my daughter and me beautiful, curly hair.

No, there are others who I've lost and loved more, yet it is my Grandpa Wells who pays me a visit. This effort of being receptive to visits from the dead is not all sparkle and cheer. The dead may ask us, "have you, the living, confronted what you need to

confront? Have you buried the hatchet of any ill will, have you halted the familial patterns of hurt and destruction?"

Or maybe your visits from the dead are of events from long ago, events we thought dead and buried, but in this visitation of remembrance, we recognize their impact in a new way, and there is this opportunity to feel again, to try once again to reconcile, to accept.

The work of healing, like the seasons of the Great Mother, is cyclical. We do what work we can and then we lay it to rest, until the next time we are ready to engage it, and heal some more. Some losses never heal completely. The scar we fought hard to develop is one monument in the life we have lived. A monument we strive to neither love nor hate, just accept that it is part of us and always will be.

The point is, even though it's hard, maybe even scary, let these ghosts and goblins visit you. They have your best interest at heart, for it's really the spirit of your highest self offering compassion - the chance to be vulnerable: to release emotions and let go of the hurt, the disappointment, or just the plain sadness.

As the days get darker, and possibly colder, (who knows if they really will or not in this fickle Southern California climate), we do end up being indoors more, nesting, coping with the darkness, and this is the time to, rather than succumb to loneliness or binge-watching of endless TV, we might ascent to some *intimacy* with ourselves, some intimacy with our spirits. For many, the darkness and the quiet make us want to fill it with the opposite, which is a natural instinct, and hence there are festivals of lights all over the world this time of year. I for one love jack-o-lanterns distinctly because they cheer me up. I love crazy, music-soaked Halloween parties, too. Is this not the time to howl at the moon?

Yes, it is, but, see *also* what happens when you let the quiet and the dark envelop you. Allow yourself to ferment, free of alcohol, or any such mind-altering, any such habit we have that allows us to run away from ourselves, and from our fears. I don't mean wallow in depression. I mean, wallow in your true self, be intimate with your true desires, your most important life work - be that creative and generative work, or healing work, or whatever you know it to be in your heart of hearts.

The very best part of the pagan high holy days, is this ever-renewed invitation to return to our natural selves, to the naked truth of who we are. In this modern world, so much synthetic crap gets heaped on us, sometimes so much until we can barely recognize ourselves, and then our spirits call out for a change, for health and wholeness! For purity and beauty and innocence! The Great Mother answers this call, especially at this time of year, when she takes us in her embrace, and with mercy, leads us to a higher place.

Yes, this is the time of year when we might *surrender*, allow the noise and distractions to cease, to be quiet, that we might return to ourselves, and a renewed sense of knowing who we are and our purpose.

For, if nothing else, we are reminded during the season of death that life is short, truly are we only dancing on this earth for a short while, and so, there is little time to *not* to be true to ourselves and our life's work.

And so it's a paradox I'm asking you to consider. To be productive in your unproductiveness. I'll explain. The word Hallows evokes something that is empty and I'm saying, "empty yourself." Let go of what no longer serves you and your emotional and spiritual growth. Let it die. Sometimes it means letting go of working too much, of that manic rat race that we may even feel lost without, so much is it a part of our identity. But to have the courage to hallow ourselves of everything non-essential *is* productive, for it gives our spirits some room to breathe, and the parts of us long dead may resurrect, may breathe new life into us. Just imagine if it were so.

We, the living, are powerful beyond measure, for there is so much the dead can no longer do. It is this poignant reminder of the preciousness of life that we embrace today. It is up to us to finish what the dead may have started, to evolve the soul – not just of ourselves individually, but to evolve the soul of our families, our community and our world, to evolve the strength and spirit of the generations, so our children may grow up unfettered, healthy, and strong, knowing how to hurt less and love more.

I tell you, the Great Mother is rooting us on! The dead, our lost loved ones, are rooting us on. They tell us, love, while you still can love; create, while you still can create; make peace, while you still can make peace. Heal yourself and heal the world.

To the Great Mother and her seasons, and for our lives, for all our blessings and the dazzling abundance of the earth we enjoy, we give thanks. It is in gratitude that we pledge to surrender to the lessons of the season, the gifts of wisdom and evolution so freely offered to us, *if* we open our hearts to receive them.

And now, for all that we have lost, may we be soothed with the requiem.

MUSICAL OFFERING "Requiem"