

Happy Hallow Eve! A Reflection from Bats and Mission Life

by Gertrudes C. Samson

Happy Hallow Eve!

During the month of November children here in the UK are celebrating Halloween. And so as early as the month of October they are preparing and buying their costumes. Then the night before November 1st children would be knocking at the door of houses dressed in their Halloween costumes which is usually scary but looks cute and funny. And they will say "Happy Halloween! Treat or Tricks!" So, we people at the house, got to be ready with candies and treats so we will not receive or suffer tricks from them.

The tradition nowadays is so far now from the original tradition in the early times. The word Halloween came from the word Hallow Eve. Hallow is an Old English Term which means Holy. Just like in the Old English Version of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, "hallowed" be thy name... In the modern English we say: Our Father in heaven, "holy" be your name... And so Happy Hallow Eve means Happy Holy Eve in the serious sense for the Catholics. Honestly, for us lay missionaries, we celebrate it both in serious and funny way.

Just like on Christmas Eve it's a Holy Eve Celebration because November 1st is the Feast of All Saints. It's All Saints Day! So, we could also wear costumes of our favourite saints and angels. The word saints in the early church means all believers both the living and the dead, not just the saints canonized by the Pope, therefore its "Feast Day of All Believers in Christ". So, advance "Happy All Saints Day" to all of us on November 1st.

In Philippines, November 1st is bank holiday because people will travel just like in pilgrimage going to their provinces to visit their dead relatives at the cemetery and light a candle, whom we believe are now in heaven with God. And so just like Christmas it also became reunion for families to come together and recall happy memories about the departed relatives. Those who cannot travel for whatever reason, will also light a candle at the front door of their house for their dead relatives. My mother said, all departed will have a procession themselves passing the doors of their relatives, and they would be happy to see that a candle is lighted to guide their way during the procession, a sign that their loved ones still remembered them.

Bats as Famous Creature and Symbols of Halloween and Horror Films.

Nowadays, as you look for costumes and decoration in the shops for Halloween, surely bat/s are there. And if there are horror films especially with vampire characters, there is also a bat in the film. There will always be scenes where the vampire will turn to bat, or the bat turn to vampire. Of course, it gave wrong impressions about bats, and prejudice on bats are also developed.

Recently this year, the Columbans organized a Bat Walk at the grounds of the Columbans in Solihull. When the invitation to the event was announced, honestly, at first, I had a second thought of attending it because of the many horror films I have watched in the past. It made me developed prejudice about bats. The immediate fear on my head - "What if the bats bit me or attack me during the walk!"

On the night that the Columban's Bat Walk is about to happen, while eating my early dinner at the kitchen of Solihull, my fellow Columbans James and Jane suddenly arrived with all the shopping that needs to be prepared as snacks for the events. They asked me, "Ger, are you joining the Bat Walk tonight?" I said I am not sure (of course because of my fear). But then, because they both seem enthusiastic and excited about the bat walk, after helping them prepare and set up the snacks, I finally decided to join them on the Bat Walk which started with a lecture part explaining the myths and real facts about the bats.

St. Columban said in one of his sermons: "If you want to know the Creator you must first know His Creation." I am thankful to God I joined the Bat Walk because the myths and facts in my head about bats were clarified. The one portrayed on the films about association with vampires are just myth, they do not attack humans, they even try to avoid us. The positive contribution of bats to the environment were also talked about. The fascinating details how God designed bats as a creature is truly amazing too. And so, my prejudices about bats were all wiped away. At the end of the lecture, I totally agreed with the lecturer when she said that "Bats are amazing." Indeed, now I believe that "Bats are amazing creatures of God too". And I realized there were so much to reflect about them. My fear was replaced with excitement before we began the Bat Walk.

Learning from the Bats as part of God's creation.

After the Bat Walk, while we are keeping the stuff used in the events, Fr. John Collins and I talked about the activity and the lecture. I said to him that I am grateful that the walk started with the lecture, because I was afraid of bats before because of the myths that lecturer exactly discussed - the false portrayal of bats in horror films. I told him also the story about fruit bats and my family. He said to me, "Ger you should have shared that story a while ago during the lecture, surely the people will find that interesting." And this was the story...

When I was a child, me and my elder brother dared to go and play to other part of our *barangay* (village). My brother and I met an elderly man who asked us, where do you come from? We said *lolo* (a title of respect for an elderly man), we are also from this village. "From which family do you come from?" he asked. We said, "Lolo we are from the Samson Family." He further asked, "who are your grandparents?" We replied, "we are grandchildren of Milio and Pania." "Oh, grand children of Milio and Pania, you are from the "Bayakan" family." Curious I am as I child, I asked, "Lolo what do you mean by "Bayakan" family?" He said, "Bayakan" meaning fruit bats. I asked, "why are you calling our family fruit bats?" He had a laugh at me, maybe trying to joke to me as a child he replied, "because you all turned to fruit bats at night." I felt offended by what I heard, I said, "No lolo, that is not true. I never turned into fruit bat at night." He laughed again, perhaps trying to further joke on me, he said "You don't because you are still a child, you will when you grow up."

That joke stayed on me that night and made me wonder is my family cursed? How could he accuse us like that, my family are very religious and actively going to the church. I cannot fully sleep that night, one of my eyes remain open checking if one of my family will turn into a fruit bat, and because nobody did, in the morning, I had the courage to ask, "Mum, why does the elderly man on the other part of our village calls us "Bayakan Family" instead of Samson Family? Mum said, "oh those are just "name calling" people say, I think because some people are jealous of the successful life of your grandfather." Then my mum explained the real story...

Before you were born, this place where we live now used to have fruit trees planted by our grandfather. The fruit trees of your grandfather are amazingly full of big fruits and so fruit bats come at night to eat some of the fruits. In the morning, children of the neighbours also climb the trees and eat the fruits until they are full and when they go down their shirts are also full of fruits to take home. Then I asked, "Grandfather do not chase them to go away?" She said, "No, your grandfather does not mind sharing it with others." I also asked, "Grandfather do not chase the bats to go away too?" "Your grandfather said there is nothing wrong with fruit bats, they are harmless creatures. They just eat some fruits." I further asked, "How about being called Bayakan Family, he is not offended by that?" My mum said, "No, he usually just smiles at them."

In my mind as child, I was thinking how I wish that those bats never came to my grandfather's garden, so that no one will do name calling to our family as fruit bats family. I did not know at that time, that bats are amazing and that I should not feel offended like my grandfather.

My reflection on the message God in the story of Bats for us humans.

Now, after hearing the real facts about bats, that they were useful to the environment, and after further readings I made about them, I realized the fruit bats that came to my grandfather's garden were the key to the success of his garden because: bats are like bees; they help the flowers to cross pollinate and so fruit trees grow and bear more fruits. Oh, that is why grandfather's fruit trees have lots of fruits! The droppings of bats are the most expensive fertilizers because they are so rich. Oh, that is why the fruits of my grandfather's trees are big and plenty, even though he does not buy fertilizers! Bats also eat insects that are pests to the plants. Oh, that is why, my grandfather does not need pesticides! That explains why my grandfather's trees have so many big fruits, so plenty that he has lots to share to neighbours and even to the bats themselves.

In addition to that, according to my mum, the flowers that my grandfather planted in his garden at that time were so beautiful and plenty, and so he got plenty to sell in front of the church, which brought additional income to the family. Now, I realized that those bats acted like bees that worked the night shifts extra hours to also help those flowers to cross pollinate and bloom, and their droppings became their natural fertilizers too. Indeed, I realized bats are truly amazing creatures, created by God to do the night shift work, so we humans have more fruits and flowers to enjoy and share with others and sustain our needs.

The myths that happened to bats, also happened to humans like migrants. Hostility to migrants of some people in the UK happened to heighten just few months ago as shown in the news, due to myths and false information about migrants. There are groups of people who became hostile on the presence of migrants in the country, and so there were riots in several parts of the UK. There are even some groups of people attacking accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees or houses of migrants and the place where they are. There were incidents also here in our mission area in Birmingham. Indeed, for me it is heart breaking to see it in the news.

Few days after that, I personally experienced hostility too from three boys. They were shouting something, which at first, I did not recognize the word they were shouting or, a part of me was in denial that I could hear such from children. Until one of them even came near to me and said, "Excuse me. Excuse me." And so, I turned to him, thinking that he might need help. Then he said "Go back. Leave UK." I can't believe it, so I said to him, "What did you say?" He suddenly seemed frozen and was not able to repeat it. Then I realized that "Go back. Leave UK" is the words they were shouting a while ago. To my surprise, my lips said to him, "God bless you." Then he turned away, together with his friends they rode their bicycles and left me. When I turned again in front of me, I realized we were exactly in front of the church. I thank God that "God bless you" is the word that came out of my lips and not something else because human as I am, I felt hurt, and it made me feel sad for several days.

Several days later, people with positive attitude towards migrants put posters on the walls of several places in Birmingham that says, "Thank God for Immigrants!" It lifted my spirit every time I see one of those posters. I heard also that there were groups of people who did peaceful demonstrations in several parts of the country to raise awareness on the positive contribution of migrants in the country. It gave me hope, seeing that there are also plenty of people around who see the value of contributions of migrants in society and are willing to balance what is going on the society with positive actions.

Migrants are like bats, while the bees are resting at night, the bats go out to do night shift, doing the difficult crucial extra needed time. Migrants contribute a lot to the society also. To name a few: Migrants contribute economically through employment, filling critical skill shortages, and establishing businesses that create jobs. According to the Office for National Statistics, migrants contribute approximately £83 billion to the UK's economic output annually. Research also shows that migrant workers play a crucial role in sectors like healthcare, STEM industries, and finance. And the list goes on...etc. *(Based on the article: Immigration & Societal Contributions by Anne Morris, 15 April 2024).*

Please read more in this link below:

<https://www.davidsonmorris.com/immigration-societal-contributions/#:~:text=The%20economic%20and%20societal%20impacts,the%20UK's%20economic%20output%20annually>

Prayer for those who are hostile to Migrants.

Just like bats, migrants experience hostility too because of the myths and false facts people heard that made them developed prejudice about migrants.

Yes, I am a migrant. After 14 years of serving here in the UK as a Columban lay missionary, helping the poor and marginalized in the society, for me, they are now my brothers and sisters too. "UK Is Now My Home Too." And so, I would like to share my prayers for those who are hostile to Migrants. With peace and sincerity in my heart, this is also my prayers for the three boys who said to me, "Go back. Leave UK."

Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. I believe some of them, were just misinformed, but if there are people who will let them know the other side of the story about migrants, they will also be enlightened too and will have a change of heart.

May God bless them with wisdom to know what is right and what is wrong, so they will not just imitate or be swayed by what they see others are doing, or what they hear others are saying. May they listen also to the other side of the story about migrants and see the positive contribution of migrants to society.

Please let them realize that migrants are also part of your beautiful, diversified creation that they must come to get to know too, to know you more. Amen.

Pictures to Choose from for:

Ger's Article:

Happy Hallow Eve! A Reflection from Bats and Mission Life

Celebrating All Saints Day both in Serious and Funny way:

We pray seriously for the souls of the departed,
and we have funny Halloween costume party too with the children in the past.



Halloween Poster with Bats

Source: <https://www.bats.org.uk/support-bats/halloween-for-bats>

Date Accessed: 19/10/2024



Picture of Flying Bat

Source: <https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/18929260904222795/>

Date Accessed: 19/20/2024



Group Picture of those who joined the Columban Bat Walk 2nd of August 2024

In the picture, the white board behind contain the silhouette of the size of smallest and biggest bat species known.

Sourced: Columbans Britian

<https://www.facebook.com/100064593133231/posts/876905561139207/?mibextid=rS40aB7S9Ucbxw6v>

Date Accessed 19/10/2024.



Thank God for Immigrants. These posters appeared in several parts of Birmingham.

Source: <https://x.com/KingsHeathUnity/status/1826298072823206205>

Accessed 19/10/2024.



Hundreds of anti-racism protesters march through Birmingham

Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2y0p48e8yo>

Date Accessed: 19/10/2024

