Columns
Spirituality



A woman lights a candle on the grave of her mother at the Manila North Cemetery during All Saints' Day in Manila, Philippines, Nov. 1, 2022. (CNS/Reuters/Lisa Marie David)



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"Memory Man" is a lead character in a series of novels by David Baldacci. Because of a head injury incurred on the football field, Amos Decker remembers everything, forgetting nothing. This rare brain disease might sound amazing, but it is much more of a burden. He recalls and envisions everything that has happened in his life — good and bad. The flood of emotions are often too much to bear. Through him, one can really appreciate the value of forgetting.

And yet, to remember is so important. Perhaps that is why, throughout human history, special rituals have been created and special days set aside to remember. Birthdays, anniversaries and holidays help us remember those among us, reminding them of a special occasion or an event that still has significance for who we are as a nation or planetary community. And it seems most cultures also have a day to remember those who have gone before us — those who have died and have transitioned to new life.

Many of us are familiar with *Día de los Muertos*, the Mexican Day of the Dead made popular by the movie "Coco." Perhaps less known is Luminatia, the Romanian day of the Dead, or Samhain, the Gaelic celebration in Ireland, or Undas, the Philippine tradition.

Of course, in the United States, it is Halloween. Although now that Halloween surpasses Christmas in terms of money spent on decorations, lights and costumes, the original meaning may be getting lost. Perhaps we can still find the sense of honoring and respecting those who have gone before us in the Christian feasts of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day.

In the Catholic tradition, All Saints' remembers those women and men who led exemplary lives, which the official church recognized by making them saints. All Souls' honors all the faithful departed who are not yet in heaven. As we are coming to understand in new ways the cosmology of our universe and ongoing evolutionary process, these feasts challenge me, calling for a new interpretation.

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After entering into the spaciousness of contemplation, I found myself saying these days call us to *re-member*. I consciously wrote *re-member* as a hyphenated word. According to the dictionary, *re-* is a prefix that means to redo. *Member* is a part of the body, a limb or a constituent piece of a complex structure, or a person, animal, or plant belonging to a particular group.

When we re-member, we are consciously recalling those persons, places, or things that are needed if we, those living now, are to be whole. We are the ongoing integration of all that we have experienced throughout our lives. And unlike the Memory Man, we forget. So when we take time to re-member, the forgotten come home and reattach, reintegrate and become part of us again.

On All Saints' Day, we can pause and re-member our family, friends and historical ancestors who have transitioned into new life. We can conjure them up — seeing them, feeling them, hearing them, smelling them, tasting them — getting in touch with the gifts they gave us.

We gain strength and confidence in re-membering what they taught us about life, about values, about being authentic to who we are. Even the more difficult memories can help us re-member and help us grow in forgiveness and acceptance of limitations. We become more whole as we re-member those who have gone before us.

On All Souls' Day, we can re-member all of our relations in the planetary community. As important as each of us is, we become truly who we are only in relationship to others. We can take time to wander the planet in our minds and hearts raising up the suffering of all beings — sentient and nonsentient. We can name the values and hopes that we have to alleviate such suffering.

We can hold tenderly those with whom we disagree, those whom we blame for the chaos we are experiencing, those who blame us for the same reason. We can pray for the capacity to re-member all of our kin so as to move together into the future becoming more whole.

This year, celebrate All Saints' and All Souls' Days by taking time to enter into contemplation. Create a spaciousness to see anew the hope that is being sustained for us by all who have transitioned into new life, by our communion of saints. Create a spaciousness to grow in compassion and understanding for all those with whom we are creating the future of our planet in hopes of living the "kindom of God on earth

as it is in heaven."