

The Great Pumpkin (Gene Narsete)



Today is the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, aka All Souls Day. It is traditionally associated with the three days of “Allhallowtide” – which includes All Saints Day, Halloween (its vigil) and All Souls Day (the day after). For some, these days signal the beginning of the “Holiday Season.” Which brings us to tonight’s reflection.

I often suggest that people consult their dictionaries, and meditate upon the similarities and differences among four words: ‘Faith’ and ‘Hope’ versus ‘Trust’ and ‘Belief’. The main difference between these pairs of terms is that one group is physically observable and measurable, while the other is not.

Let’s look at them through an iconic autumn ritual: Halloween Night – when Linus awaits the arrival of the Great Pumpkin. At first glance, Linus is simply confusing the anticipation of one great icon (Santa Claus) with another (the Great Pumpkin). As Linus explains it,

“Each year, the Great Pumpkin rises out of the pumpkin patch that he thinks is the most sincere. He’s gotta pick this one. He’s got to. I don’t see how a pumpkin patch can be more sincere than this one! You can look around and there’s not a sign of hypocrisy. Nothing but sincerity as far as the eye can see.”

Did you catch Linus’ faith in the Coming, and the hope of its Reward? St. Paul tells the Hebrews that “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.”

Linus further expresses his faith, hope, and perseverance in his annual letter of petition:

Dear Great Pumpkin,

I am looking forward to your arrival on Halloween night. I hope you will bring me lots of presents. Everyone tells me you are a fake, but I believe in you.

Sincerely,

Linus Van Pelt

P.S. If you really are a fake, don’t tell me. I don’t want to know.

At this point, I'd like to remind you of a couple of ideas I mentioned last month. Namely, that Faith is the acceptance of truth in the absence of evidence; and that Denial is the rejection of truth in the presence of overwhelming evidence. Linus has just expressed his sincerest feelings about both of these ideas. Alas, the Great Pumpkin never appears; nor does the evidence that Santa Claus brings – presents.

Christmas Presents do pose some other questions as well. For example, which comes first: the presents or the belief? That is, do we believe because we receive or do we receive because we believe? Are there any other interpretations for the appearance of these gifts? Or maybe, they are just independent events?

As we've probably all noticed at one dinner party or another, these conversations about the nature and source of gifts can trigger strong core-level reactions. Here's a classic example, as revealed in an exchange with Linus when his sister Lucy proclaims:

"You must be crazy! When are you going to stop believing in something that isn't true?"

"When 'you' stop believing in that fellow with a red suit and the white beard who goes, 'Ho, ho, ho!'"

"We're obviously separated by denominational differences."

So, in closing, I offer Linus' later insight into this problem as advice for our own holiday festivities:

"There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people: religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin."