

## Zahradníček's blog for English speaking students

### Part twenty two: Halloween, or *Dušičky*?

Many Czechs are very sensitive concerning their traditions. Nevertheless, it is sometimes funny that they do not know these traditions exactly, or they do not understand them.

Czechs have an important day – 2<sup>nd</sup> November, it is *Památka zesnulých* – Commemoration of The Deceased (sometimes also translated as Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed). However, this official term is not used in common speech; people use to call it simply *Dušičky*, what is a diminutive of *duše* – souls. In English, it is also reported as the All Souls' Day. Lots of people come to visit cemeteries, Brno trams No. 5 normally circulating to Mendel's Square are prolonged to the Central Cemetery, and this year there exists even a special minibus line circulating directly inside the cemetery (well, it has some logic, because the Brno Central Cemetery, a smaller copy of the "Zentralfriedhof" in Vienna, is the second largest cemetery in the whole Czechia). In the evening, you can walk through the cemetery in dark and fog and seeing just thousands of candles. Apart from civil tombs the cemetery also contains tombs of the victims of World War II – Russians, Germans and other nations – and also some victims of other wars, even some from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that have been moved to the Central Cemetery from their original places. The atmosphere is quite nostalgic.

The Commemoration of The Deceased is closely related to the All Saints' Day, that is celebrated just one day before. In fact, these Saints are also brave people that should be commemorated; in Roman Catholic tradition, Saints serve as a pattern of behaviour, especially for those having their names.

And from All Saints's Day, or All Hallow's Day, it is just a short step to the evening preceding it – All Hallow's Even, or simply Halloween. In fact, Halloween has exactly the same roots as All Souls' Day. Nevertheless, Czech people would never believe it. *Dušičky* is a traditional day, but Halloween, although related and having quite similar symbols of candles in dark (just placed inside of a pumpkin) is considered to be an „imported feast“. Good luck, younger generation is not so traditional and so it understands that there is no reason for not celebrating such a nice day full of ghosts, bats, witches and „pleasant fright“. Especially for children, Halloween is a nice event and they can enjoy it.

Of course, it is possible to see also commercial point of view: already weeks before Haloween (and All Souls' Day) the markets are full of candles, electric lights, pumpkins, bats, pointed hats and many other features, that are later replaced by chocolate statues of St. Nicolas and devil, and finally by reindeers and any other requisities for Christmas. But of course, all season's days are „commercialised“ and it is not a reason why to hate such a nice holiday as Halloween. Nevertheless, some Czechs do so, and they are even keen to label any peerson celebrating Halloween as a „parricide“ or „slave of foreign traditions“. The same, even more, is also valid for Christmas, but it might be better to let it for another blog.

We might also come deeper in the history. In times when neither Haloween-celebrating England nor All Souls' celebrating Bohemia and Moravia was chistian, people in Europe celebrated Samhain, an old Celtic feast, also full of lights in dark. It is quite natural, like an instinct, that when days become shorter, people try to find some light in dark – in summer, light is not that precious, as the day is long; but in November people need some light that would come to them through the darkness. And so some people would say that neither Halloween nor All Soul's day is „the original one“; it is rather the Samhain, or maybe something even older. By the way, it is not such a nonsense to speak about Celtic traditions in Czechia. Even the name of Bohemia comes from a Celtic tribe of *Boii*, that inhabited the are of what is today Czechia prior to Germans and Slaves. Many people in Czechia believe that they have some Celtic roots, and even some anthropologic research supports it, although some other researches are not so clear. But at leasts Czechs are fans of Celtic feasts, not only Samhain, but also Lughnasad in summer (like the Lughnasad celebration in Veveří castle) and others. And also *Dušičky* are closer to Halloween than it seems.