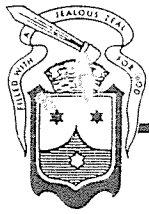


✓ 10/2001



## Carmelite Spiritual Center

8433 Bailey Road \* Darien, Illinois 60561 \* 630-969-4141

Oct. 6, 2000

### Life is Worth Giving

#### LEGEND OF "STINGY JACK" CONTAINS MORAL LESSON

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

One of the most prominent symbols of Halloween is the Jack-O'-Lantern. This somewhat modern Jack is named after a greedy fellow named "Stingy Jack" who was not only a miser but also an evil practical joker in Ireland centuries ago. During his long lifetime, Stingy Jack was never known to do a good deed, help a neighbor in distress, or share his considerable wealth with the needy. It is recounted that when he did make a loan, which was infrequent, he charged exorbitant interest rates and never gave the person any peace until the loan and interest were fully repaid.

Poor farmers who were foolish enough to seek a loan from Stingy Jack often lost what little they had in trying to repay it. Widows and orphans fared little better when they sought help from him who seemed bent on making life miserable for others. The milk of human kindness flowed not in this man's veins. His one joy in life came from playing practical jokes on others. Stingy Jack would howl with laughter when cows destroyed a farmer's grain — after Jack had opened the gate. He derived enjoyment from giving wrong directions to a forlorn traveler who had the misfortune to ask the way of him. Even the clergy weren't exempt from Jack's perverse attention.

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Church bells would be rung to announce services that weren't scheduled, or the death of a parishioner who was still very much alive. All thanks to Stingy Jack.

After a life of making many people miserable, Jack died and came before the Judgment Seat. Taking one look at his record, St. Peter ordered Stingy Jack to the lower realms. But when the Devil arrived to claim Jack, the miser suggested that they stop at the local pub for a drink before starting out on the road to Hades. The Devil, seeing no harm in the suggestion, agreed. Stopping at the first pub they encountered, the pair discovered that neither had any money. Jack offered a solution to their dilemma: "Turn yourself into a shilling coin," he said, knowing the great powers of deceit the Devil possessed. "And after we've paid for the drinks, you can change back to yourself."

Even though he was aware of Jack's reputation for all sorts of trickery, the Devil reluctantly agreed. But as soon as the Devil changed (himself) into a shilling, Jack seized the coin and popped it into his change purse which had a cross-shaped catch. Since the Devil was unable to get by the barrier of the cross and free himself, he was wild with anger and frustration and issued shrieks of ~~rage~~ (for Hades) rage and curses.

"Promise never to claim me, and I'll let you out," sneered Stingy Jack.

The enraged Devil was forced to agree to this most strange of bargains.

Stingy Jack thought that he had gotten the best of both Heaven and Hell with his trick. But his malicious glee quickly faded when he realized he now could find no resting place anywhere. His punishment is to walk the earth with his lantern each night until Judgment Day, tired and weary, but finding no rest.

He is often reported as being in various places all over the face of the earth, but especially in Ireland around Halloween. Sometimes the lantern he carries, which is strangely shaped like a pumpkin, takes on a malicious grin when Stingy Jack remembers the tricks he played on many people long ago. But mostly, the lantern displays the sad weariness of a man who spent his life making others miserable, and now can find neither happiness or rest.