Ghosts, goblins, witches, and zombies usually dominate this time of year for the Halloween holiday in the U.S. However, around the world November 1st is acknowledged as a holiday to remember those who have passed. The most famous celebration occurs in Latin America, specifically Dia de Muertos (Day of the Dead) in Mexico. The festival was, in part, developed from the Aztecs. Festivities were dedicated to a goddess known as the “Lady of the Dead,” corresponding to the modern La Calavera Catrina. People in many cultures go to cemeteries to be with the souls of the departed. They may also build private altars containing the favorite foods and beverages, as well as photos and memorabilia, of their lost loved ones. The intent of these actions is to encourage visits by the souls, so the souls will hear the prayers and the comments of the living directed to them. While Halloween can have a spooky tone, the celebrations on November 1st can often be humorous, as celebrants remember funny events and anecdotes about the departed.

Dia de Muertos also stems from All Saints Day and All Souls Day, a Catholic custom. It appears that in every country the Day of the Dead occurs at the year’s end, after the last harvests, when the barren earth is thought to give passage to the souls lying beneath it. For many centuries in Christian Europe, rites were moved from cultivated fields to cemeteries. People in many countries still take off from work and gather at cemeteries or churches with candles and flowers, and give presents to children, usually sweets and toys. While the exact traditions vary by country, they all pray over the dead.

Traditions honoring the dead are not unique to the West; from Africa to China, festivals for the departed can be found. The Qingming festival is a traditional Chinese festival similar in nature, usually occurring around April 5. In addition to that holiday, Buddhists and Taoists also celebrate the Ghost Month, when they believe that ghosts and spirits come out from the underworld to visit earth. The Bon Festival is a Japanese Buddhist holiday held in August to honor the spirits of departed ancestors.

Throughout the year, many cultures find time to honor those who have died. While these holidays may differ in time and customs, all have the same thing in common: to cherish the memories of loved ones no longer with us.