

Dear Friends,

Sometimes, not very often, something very special happens when I am presiding at Mass: I am haunted by the realization that my good friend, Fr. Steve Harrington, who died in June of 1991, just three weeks after I was ordained, is standing with me in spirit during the Eucharistic Prayer and we are, in a sense, concelebrating the Eucharist.

It kind of sounds like I am a little nuts, doesn't it? But in each of the Eucharistic prayers, we hear words that sound like this,

- *“Remember, Lord, those who have died and have gone before us marked with the sign of faith.... May these, and all who sleep in Christ find in your presence light, happiness and peace (Eucharistic Prayer I).*
- *“Remember our brothers and sisters who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again; bring them and all the departed into the light of your presence. (Eucharistic Prayer II).”*
- *“Welcome into your kingdom our departed brothers and sisters and all who have left this world in your friendship (Eucharistic Prayer III).”*
- *Remember those who have died in the peace of Christ and all the dead whose faith is known to you alone (Eucharistic Prayer IV).”*

All of these prayers are petitions for our loved ones who have died. Why do we offer these petitions? Because we believe that they live on in God's kingdom and in their living they are united with us in the Eucharistic celebration. We believe in the Communion of the Saints and the dead. We believe that the Eucharistic meal we share is our earthly participation in the eternal banquet.

In the Mass there is a spiritual union between those of us who live here on this earth right now and those who have died and now live in eternity.

So, when I am haunted by the feeling that my dear friend is standing with me praying the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, I believe he is. It is not “crazy thinking” to believe that our loved ones who have died celebrate the Mass in communion with us. This is what the Church teaches, and has always taught.

This coming week we are going to celebrate Halloween and the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls. Over the last several centuries, October 31 has been a strange brew of Christian and Pagan feasts which help us to understand the connection between this earthly life and the life beyond the dead. In many ways it is frightening to think about what our lives will be like after we die. Unfortunately, we will not know that until that day comes for us. In many ways the ghostly and frightening costumes worn on Halloween play into that sense of fright we experience when we think about the dead living in communion with us.

Our Church celebrates this reality. Our loved ones who have died need our prayers. Those of us who live today need the prayers of those who have died. The Mass unites us with each other, with the Virgin Mary and the Saints, with the Pope, the bishops and clergy, and our loved ones who have died.

So, when my friend Fr. Steve prays the Eucharistic Prayers of the Mass with me, I miss his physical presence in a very powerful way, but I take great comfort in sharing the Priesthood with him. I find great peace in knowing that we pray together: with and for each other.

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel