Dear Friends,

If you read the Observer, the weekly newspaper for the Rockford Diocese, you know that we are encouraged to visit the graves of loved ones who have died, as we celebrate the feasts of All Saints and All Souls. I hope that you will accept this encouragement in a prayerful way. There is a healing quality to visiting the graves of loved ones who have died. In the stillness of the cemetery, the sadness and grief we feel often gives way to a quiet acceptance. We get the sense that we are physically present, that the connection we have shared with those we love continues. This awareness can be comforting for us.

However, when we pray for the deceased we do more than remember what they mean to us, we also keep alive the spiritual communion we share with them. This communion is experienced in a powerful way through our celebration of the Eucharist. Listen carefully to the Eucharistic Prayers at Mass. You will hear me say words like:

- Remember, Lord, those who have died and have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, especially those for whom we now pray… (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. We hope to enjoy for ever the vision of your glory, through Christ our Lord, from whom all good things come (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).

Every one of the Eucharistic Prayers has this kind of language, and for good reason: the banquet of Holy Communion unites us with each other, and with those who have died. Those we love who have died continue to partake of the Body of Christ with us in our celebration of the Mass. So,

when we come to Mass, our communion unites us spiritually with the heavenly banquet. The Body of Christ we receive at Mass is physical, and it is spiritual. It is our connection with heaven here and now.

It is also a union of love that continues with our beloved who have died. There have been times when I have stood at the altar reciting the prayer of consecration over the bread and wine and I have felt in a real and tangible way the presence of friends and family members who have died. One of those friends is a priest, Fr. Steve Harrington. We were classmates and roommates at Loras College. Steve was a priest of the Archdiocese of Dubuque. He died in a tragic accident about a month after I was ordained.

Sometimes I become aware of his spiritual presence during the Eucharistic Prayer and it is so real it feels like he is concelebrating the Mass with me. The first time this happened, which was shortly after his death, that awareness was profoundly emotional. I could hardly speak the words. Now, I find great comfort, even a sense of joy knowing he *is* with me in the celebration of the Mass. The spiritual union we share as friends and brother priests comes to light most vividly in the Eucharistic celebration.

All Saints and All Souls are important and beautiful feasts because they bring to light a union of prayer, a bond of love that is eternal. We pray for those who have died and for their comfort and peace in eternal life. They are united with us in prayer that we may find healing and peace in our own experiences of sorrow and grief. To remember and to be present to those we love who have died is simply a part of being human. We are spiritual beings united body and soul to eternity. How wonderful it is to celebrate this reality in Holy Communion.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel