

About a month ago while war raged half a world away in Kosovo, an American reporter had lunch with her congressman. She seized the opportunity to challenge him on the battle plan. She had no quarrel with the basic objective of the conflict, but she thought NATO's officers were not aggressive enough. Specifically she favored the immediate deployment of troops on the ground. The congressman asked her if she understood how much human life would be lost. "Yes," she replied, "but it's the best way to win this war." The congressman paused a moment. His expression changed as he asked, "You have young adult children, don't you?" "Yes," she replied. "Are you saying you would send your children on the ground to fight this war?" "Well, no," she admitted. "Not my children, not this cause."

I suspect a lot of parents felt the same. Back in the 1940s GIs were admired in this country because they put their lives on the line for a cause. Today this question isn't so easy to answer. What are you willing to die for? What are you willing to have your children die for?

Our church was founded on martyrs, saints who gave up their lives out of love for Jesus Christ. Listen to the words of Ignatius of Antioch. This is not Ignatius Loyola, the founder the Jesuits, but the bishop of Antioch who was arrested under the emperor Trajan about the year 110, and wrote this to the Christians in Rome where he was being taken to be thrown the lions. "Beg for me courage and endurance that I may not only be called a Christian, but prove to be one. Let me be the food of beasts that I may come to God. I am God's wheat, and I shall be ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may become Christ's pure bread. I would rather that you coaxed the beasts to become my tomb and to leave no scrap of me behind; then when I have died I will be a burden to no one. How happy I will be with the beasts which are prepared for me! I hope that they will make short work of me. Now I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible rob me of my prize, which is Jesus Christ."

A third century document tells catechumens not to worry if they suffer martyrdom before they can be baptized. The spilling of their blood will count for their baptism. In the twentieth century, we no longer include that notice in our books. In south Kansas City, Raytown, and Lee's Summit we don't face the same threats they did in the early church. We have a privileged Christianity and a pampered citizenship. It's hard to imagine what in the world we would die for when on most days it's hard to imagine what in the world we'd get off the couch for.

Paul says in his letter to the Romans today, "Rarely will anyone die for a righteous person. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." Americans believe it's noble to die for your country, but not for some other country. Yet, when the opportunity came to save the human race, God did not respond, "Not my child, not this cause."

We Christians are rarely called to sacrifice our lives. But we are called to sacrifice our time, our talent, and our treasure, to accept inconvenience in order to promote charity.