

When the Last Supper was over, Jesus was arrested, beaten, and stripped of his clothes. Soldiers whipped him till he bled. They forced a crown of thorns into his skull. He carried a cross up a hill where they drove nails into his hands and feet and hung him till he became delirious for thirst. He died, but they weren't done; they drove a lance into his side. We learn that much from Scripture. We don't know exactly how the apostles died, but traditions grew up about them: Matthias was crucified; so was Andrew, on an X-shaped cross. Peter was crucified upside down. So was Philip. Simon and Jude suffered martyrdom in Persia. James the Greater was beheaded in Jerusalem; Paul was beheaded in Rome. Matthew was run through with a sword. So was Thomas. James the Lesser was thrown off the pinnacle of the temple; that didn't kill him, so they stoned him; that didn't kill him, so they clubbed to death. Bartholomew was skinned alive. John was boiled in oil, but that didn't kill him; he died a natural death. And Judas of course hung himself.

The blood that Jesus poured at the Last Supper was only the beginning. Since then his followers both men and women laid down their life for him. They still do it today in places like Africa and Latin America. People die for their faith in the blood of Christ. Their belief in the eucharist gives them strength. Martyrs believe that death cannot separate them from God; quite the contrary, death, especially in martyrdom, only draws them into the embrace of the God they adore. If we could have shared eucharist with any of the martyrs, I'm sure we'd <sup>have</sup> be inspired by their faith. I sometimes wonder what visitors find when they walk into St. Regis on the weekend. Do they find a community of that much faith and that much love? I honestly think so. I think they meet people whose faith in the eucharist moves them to love and serve. But it's easy for us to send the wrong message ~~while we're here~~. There's quite a contrast between a disciple ready to shed blood for the privilege of sharing the eucharist, and people who do not worship, or who worship like hypocrites; or who come to church, sit far away from everyone else, refuse to sing, never share the cup of blood that was shed for them, and leave the service early. Our ancestors died a horrible death for this eucharist, and sometimes we so take it for granted.

There are two ways we talk about what happens at Mass: we offer the eucharist, and we receive communion. Receiving's the easy part; we're all good at that. It's the offering that challenges us. At eucharist we offer our attention, our time, our devotion, and our faith; we offer our willingness to stand up for what we believe when we leave here, and we offer charity to one another. Eucharist is work. Vatican II called it the source and the summit of the Christian life. It is the source from which our life flows, and the summit toward which it is directed. As we begin these three days let's begin with eyes open wide to the miracle which appears on this altar. Let us offer eucharist today. Let us set our hearts unwaveringly on Christ. Let our faith be so strong that this becomes what we live for, that this becomes what we will die for--Jesus Christ, body and blood, present in our midst.