

God, Life, and Everything "First Kiss"

Do you remember your first kiss with that someone special?

There is only one correct answer, by the way. Whether you are married or single, straight or gay or well, anything, the correct answer is, "Of course I do!" To utter any other response is to court disaster.

And yes, I remember that first kiss with my wife. It was March. We were sitting in her candle-lit apartment and.... Um, never mind.

Anyway, I ask this question a lot. I do it partly because I have a slightly sadistic streak and enjoy watching couples squirm. Just kidding. They always nod their heads enthusiastically and say, "Absolutely!" I have no idea if they are lying or not.

You would think I would ask about the first kiss in pre-marital counseling sessions. After all, engaged couples are so excited and passionate that they remember every little detail of ever moment spent with their beloved. And yes, I do ask it of them sometimes.

But most of the time, I ask this first-kiss question in pre-baptism classes. Usually this is with parents of an infant, but sometimes it's an adult who has decided they wish to be baptized.

Either way, the kiss question comes up when we talk about what a sacrament is. For those of you who don't know about sacraments, the Church recognizes either 2 or 7 (depending on your denomination). The primary two sacraments are Baptism and Holy Communion. The other five, also known as sacramental rites, are Reconciliation (aka Confession), Unction (anointing with oil for healing), Confirmation, Holy Matrimony, and Ordination.

You might say that a sacrament is a special service in which something holy happens. The Church says a sacrament is a sign. Or, to be more precise: "The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace."

Did your eyes just glaze over?

Does it help if you shorten that to, "The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace"? You can shorten it even further to "sacraments are signs of grace."

But that's still confusing, isn't it?

So, looking at just one sacrament for simplicity's sake, I tell folks to look at the sacrament as a kiss.

I mean, think back to that first kiss, okay? Before that kiss, you were feeling something inside, weren't you? Maybe you were thinking, "Wow, she's so beautiful, so nice, so smart. I just want to be with her all the time." Maybe you were thinking, "I want more - I want a relationship."

At some point, you have to make a move. You have to decide whether or not you will attempt to make that first kiss. And until you do, you are not really in a relationship. You might like her (insert here the appropriate gender for your situation). She might like you. But that kiss, even though it's just two pairs of lips touching, is what seals the deal.

Before you kiss, you're just a potential couple. After it, you're the real deal. And from that point on, you are either a couple or an ex-couple. But the kiss was the outward and visible (not to mention physical) sign of the inner stirring you both felt.

The first kiss is like Baptism (at least for adults). You're drawn toward God. You know there's something there, and you want to act on it. You get closer and closer, but without that kiss, it's just a potential relationship. Baptism is where you get to say, "Yes! I want this! I don't necessarily understand it, but I'm in love with God."

It starts you on a relationship that will be mysterious and confounding, causing you grief and anxiety even as it fills your heart and makes you know you can't ever imagine being without each other again.

Someone said to me, "But doesn't that first kiss idea mean that we should only do adult baptism?"

In response, I think of another kind of first kiss. If you are a parent, you know what I mean. So, if you are a parent, think back to the day your child was born. Whether mother or father, you've just gone through this tremendous work of giving birth, and right there before you is this tiny person who is yours forever. It feels like a miracle when the doctor or nurse or midwife puts your child in your arms.

Or let's say you adopt a child. Same thing. First time they put that child in your arms, it's the same miracle.

Either way, what is the first thing you do? Inevitably, you kiss that child. And with that first kiss, you are forever bonded. No matter what happens next, you are the parent and that is your child, and woe to anyone who gets between you.

Infant baptism is a lot like that. Infants don't understand it any more than they understand that first kiss. But you, the parent, understand. You have just declared your bond. You have declared that you, the Christian parent, will hold this child up in the faith, teach him or her the love of God, show him or her the way to love as Christ loves.

The sacrament of Confirmation gives people who were baptized as infants a chance to stand up for themselves and say, "I want this." But if parents take baptism seriously, that first kiss is just as powerful as the other kind.

So think back to your first kiss with your someone special. Then think about your relationship with God as even more loving, more intense, more passionate. Because God is so wildly in love with you.

(Don't forget, you can purchase Chuck Kramer's book, "God, Life, and Everything" for \$12.95 plus tax. You can purchase it at Cranberry's deli or at St. James' Church. If you have any questions about the book, or would like to reserve one, you can contact Fr. Chuck at revckramer@gmail.com)