

The Kisses In The Mass



A Kiss is a gesture of affection or homage. The Old Testament speaks of the "kiss" most often in the context of family. For example, children kissed their father; men kissed their children and grandchildren; and Instances of brothers greeting one another with a kiss. We have records of women kissing their daughter-in-laws, and a man kissing his son-in-law.

Kissing in the New Testament was similar to that of the Old Testament. The father in the story of the Prodigal Son embraced and kissed his son. The sinful woman who had been forgiven of her sins by Jesus kissed His feet.

There are references in the New Testament that would have believers greeting one another with a holy kiss. We find these references in Romans 16:16, I Corinthians 16:20, II Corinthians 13:12, I Thessalonians 5:26. The early church expressed the intimate fellowship of the redeemed community of believers.

It is clear that from the earliest times a kiss was not only a token of love, but also under certain circumstances a symbol of profound respect. The Church enjoins the kissing of many holy objects, e.g. relics, the Book of the Gospels, the Cross, blessed palms, candles, the hands of the clergy and vestments connected with the liturgy. In particular, the celebrant in the course of the Mass kisses the altar.

T1. Three times in the Mass a Kiss is used by the Priest and Deacon:

A. Reverence to the Altar

1. When they have arrived at the sanctuary, the Priest, the Deacon, and the ministers reverence the altar with a profound bow (If the tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament is in the sanctuary, then instead of bowing to the altar, they should genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament.)
2. Moreover, as an expression of veneration, the Priest and Deacon then kiss the altar itself; the Priest, if appropriate, also incenses the cross and the altar.
3. It is similar to the ritual of love when we visit a friend or relative.

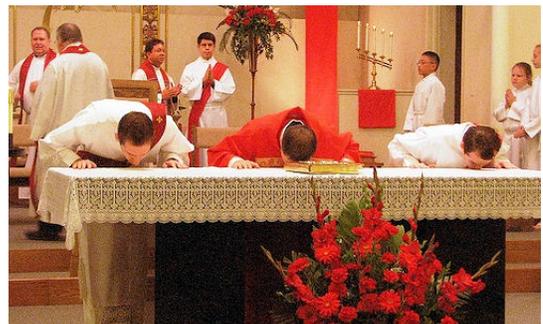
B. Gospel book is carried in procession to the ambo to the accompaniment of an acclamation sung by the people; it may be incensed before the reading and is kissed at its conclusion;

1. Following the reading of the Gospel, the Deacon or Priest venerates the Gospel Book with a kiss. He then says quietly "Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away."
2. When the Deacon is assisting the Bishop, he carries the book to the Bishop to be kissed.

C. At the end of the Concluding Rites, together the Priest and the Deacon venerate the altar with a kiss.

T2. Kissing the Altar:

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1. The significance of this kiss at first was simply for the altar itself where the Sacrifice of the Lord would occur. Subsequently this idea expanded to include the understanding that the altar built of stone represented Christ Himself, the rock, the cornerstone (1 Cor. 10:4). Later, as the relics of saints were ordinarily placed within the altar stone, the kiss was also seen as a salutation of the saint and through the saint the whole Church Triumphant.
2. Why is there a kiss, rather than a bow or some other salutation? The kiss was actually very common in ancient culture. The temple was honored by kissing the threshold. In pagan culture, it was common to greet the images of the gods either by kissing it directly or by throwing a kiss. It was not uncommon, in the ancient world, to kiss the family meal table before eating. Hence, it was not surprising to find the practice brought into Christian worship.

B. Now a closer look at why the Priest and Deacon reference the Altar with a kiss:

The “altar” is by its very nature a table of sacrifice and at the same time a Table of the Paschal Banquet. The altar is a symbol of Christ as well as the whole Christian Community. It is the place from which prayer ascends like incense before God.

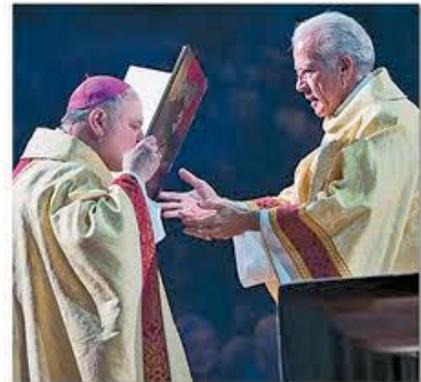
1. Now consider what takes place on the altar. An altar is a place of sacrifice, a place of offering something to God, a place of encountering God. Jesus offered Himself on earth on the “altar of the cross”, and that offering is now made present on the Church’s altar.
2. To Kiss The Altar Is To Kiss Christ:
 - a) It is then understandable that we want to make ours this kiss of the celebrant. It evokes in our memory the many kisses of that sinful woman in the Pharisee’s house. She could not cease to kiss Christ’s feet, washing them with her tears. Great sins were forgiven her because she also loved greatly, the Gospel tells us (Lk 7:38). And we have so many faults to ask pardon for!
 - b) Now, by this kiss, the priest also signifies the union of the Spouse (Christ) with his Bride (the Church). This Priest is beginning to forge the union of the Church with her Master, of the soul with its Redeemer. When the Deacon is present, he represents the people through his service to the parish.
3. Kissing the altar at the beginning and end of Mass is showing reverence to Christ and to the altar as a liturgical object itself, because it is the place where the Holy Sacrifice is made present. (Traditionally, there are relics of a saint in the altar, and the priest kisses the altar in the spot where those relics are stored.)
 - a) By kissing the altar above the place where the relics are reserved, the priest silently declares his union with and affection for the saints who have gone before him.
 - b) This kiss is a “holy kiss” (Rom. 16:16), a “kiss of love” (1 Pet. 5:14), for Christ and for His Church and her members.
 - c) It is a kiss by, which we begin to learn that the liturgy is “the purest and most sublime school of love.” (The Splendor of the Liturgy, p. 38)
4. The liturgy calls Jesus Christ priest, victim and altar: As High Priest, He makes the offering (Hebrews 5:1-10). As Victim, He is the one being sacrificed, the Lamb who was slain (Revelation 13:8).
 - a) But why altar? St. Paul says we “offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, our spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).

- b) Since we know the Father accepts Christ's sacrifice, we place our lives on Christ himself; He is the one through whom we sacrifice our lives. Reverencing the altar is reverencing Christ himself.
5. Bishop Rhodes during a Deacon retreat before he left our diocese said,
- a) "The famous Benedictine liturgist, Dom Gueranger of Solesmes, says that as the priest kisses the altar at the beginning of Mass, he should greet it like the Crib in which slept, wrapped in swaddling clothes, the Word who said I am the Bread of Life (Good also for deacons to think about when kissing the altar during Mass).
 - b) Bishop Rhodes went on to say; to him it is like kissing Baby Jesus in the crib.
6. After the Dismissal, the Priest and Deacon reverence the altar once again as they did when the Liturgy began.
- The kiss of farewell at the end of the celebration mirrors the kiss whereby the altar is greeted at the beginning of Mass. Both are gestures of venerating the table as a symbol of Christ.

T3. Kissing the Gospel Book

The Gospel is very sacred, since these are the words and deeds of Christ. It is a symbol of Christ, who is present, speaking to this Christian community, at this time and in this place.

It is Christ, who speaks when the scriptures are proclaimed in the liturgy. The word "gospel" means "good news." The "good news" is not something but someone. Jesus Christ is indeed good news.



- A.** We surround it by many distinct acts of respect:
1. One of these is that we stand for the Gospel Reading.
 2. Making of small signs of the Cross on the Book, forehead, mouth, and heart expresses readiness to open one's mind to the Word, to confess it with the mouth, and to safeguard it in the heart. We are now ready to listen to the Gospel.
 3. After proclaiming the Gospel at Mass, the Deacon or Priests kisses the text and whisper: "May the words of the Gospel wipe away our sins". This prayer is a reminder that Christ, the living Word who speaks to us in the words of the Gospels, saves us from sin.
- B.** The Gospel has a power to transform our lives if its words take flesh in our lives, so that the Word of God, Christ himself, lives in us.
- C.** When present at the celebration of the Mass, a Deacon should proclaim the Gospel.
1. When a man is ordained a Deacon, he receives these instructions: "Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, Teach what you believe, and Practice what you teach."
 2. In other words, the ordained minister is supposed to "chew" on God's word by putting it into practice in his own life. He then offers the people the results of his prayer and experience.