

## THE KISS OF PEACE NEVER CHANGES

A few months ago a parishioner asked me, "Der Hayr, does the greeting for the kiss of peace change according to the church season?" i.e. "Christ is born and revealed" (*Krisdos Dzunav yev haydnetzav*) and "Christ is risen from the dead" (*Krisdos haryav ee merelotz*). I explained the answer as follows. . . .

Before I explain the understanding of the kiss of peace, where it originates and why it does not change, allow me to state the following: As Armenian Orthodox, every time the Divine Liturgy is celebrated, we proclaim Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. As he demonstrated during the Last Supper, Jesus Christ showed us the greatest example of sacrifice, saying, "This is my body and blood, eat and drink of this in my memory." This sacrifice and shedding of blood represents God's love for us which is remembered, revealed and renewed during every celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

The celebration of the Divine Liturgy is a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven, which we realize and actualize every Sunday. We experience the beauty of God's eternal Kingdom when we participate in a timeless happening such as Liturgy. We, as God's children and faithful members of the Church, have an active role to play in the establishment of this holy sacrament. As we partake of and consume Holy Communion and internalize its saving grace through Jesus Christ, we have a call to repent and ask for forgiveness of sins. This is not only asked of us by God, but also our community, as we find the need to forgive our brothers and sisters. We need to make amends with others, and as we do so, we make right with God. The kiss of peace is a means for us to forgive others in our community. It is an opportunity for us to embrace each other in the love of Christ which burns away the sins that divide and hurt us.

Participating in the kiss of peace provides us with 11 steps to acknowledge and realize as a means of unifying the community. The next time you are in church (which will hopefully be this Sunday) remember these 11 steps as you prepare to give and receive the kiss of peace.

1. Christ is present at the moment of Liturgy and at the very moment of the kiss of peace.
2. God-eternal is enthroned and ever-present in this sanctuary.

3. The voice of peace calls to each member of Christ's body.
4. The voice is given in the form of a holy greeting.
5. The Church, which is made up of human beings, becomes one.
6. Hatred and hostility are removed from our hearts.
7. Love, which originates from the chalice of Christ, is spread to us all.
8. Worshippers raise their voices in preparation of this joy.
9. With a united voice and soul, our one mouth praises God.
10. One God in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is proclaimed.
11. The angels give praise to God during this blessed event.

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# Kiss of Peace

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As we can see, the kiss of peace is a powerful reality for the life of the Church and her members. Truly participating in the kiss of peace is an opportunity to regain that which is lost, an opportunity to correct that which is wrong, an opportunity to heal that which is wounded and an opportunity to fix that which is broken. This process stems from the only true peace which comes from Jesus Christ, as he reminds us in the Gospel of John (14:27-29) "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you."

Just before the kiss of peace is offered, a blessing is given by the priest and he says, "Peace be with you all." This blessing in particular begins from the holy chalice and represents the peace of Christ which is unchangeable, inexhaustible and unending. This exact peace is transmitted first from Christ then to the priest, to the Parish Council members and then to each member of the congregation.

