The Kiss of Peace

St. Paul routinely directed the members of the Christian communities to "greet one another with a holy kiss" [Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1Thessalonians 5:26, 1Peter 5:14]. This was a visible sign of their unity and their common vision of love in Jesus Christ. It was also an evocative reminder of Jesus' warning: "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" [Matthew 5:23].

A ritualized greeting of peace and reconciliation is found in the Eucharist of all ancient churches. In the custom of the Armenian Church the person offering the greeting inclines his head first to the right, and then to, and the left of the person being greeted. The person offering the greeting says, "Krees-dos ee mech mer hayd-ne-tsav" or "Christ is revealed among us." The one receiving the greeting responds, "Or-nyal eh hayd-noo-tyoo-nun Krees-do-see" or "Blessed is the revelation of Christ."

The Kiss of Peace reminds us of our personal responsibility to "live peaceably with all" [Romans 12:18]. This is the necessary condition for us to enjoy the blessings of the Divine Liturgy. We must ask ourselves: "Does my brother or sister have something against me? What can I do to restore peace in our relationship?" The Bible reminds us: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" [1John 4:20]. All of this is summarized beautifully in the Hymn of the Kiss of Peace [27]. Christ, the Son of God, is revealed among us in the bread and wine. When we seal our love for one another with the Kiss of Peace, and when we receive Christ in Holy Communion, then Christ unites us in a bond of love and the Church becomes "one soul." The task of creating "one soul" in the church parish belongs to each one of us.

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