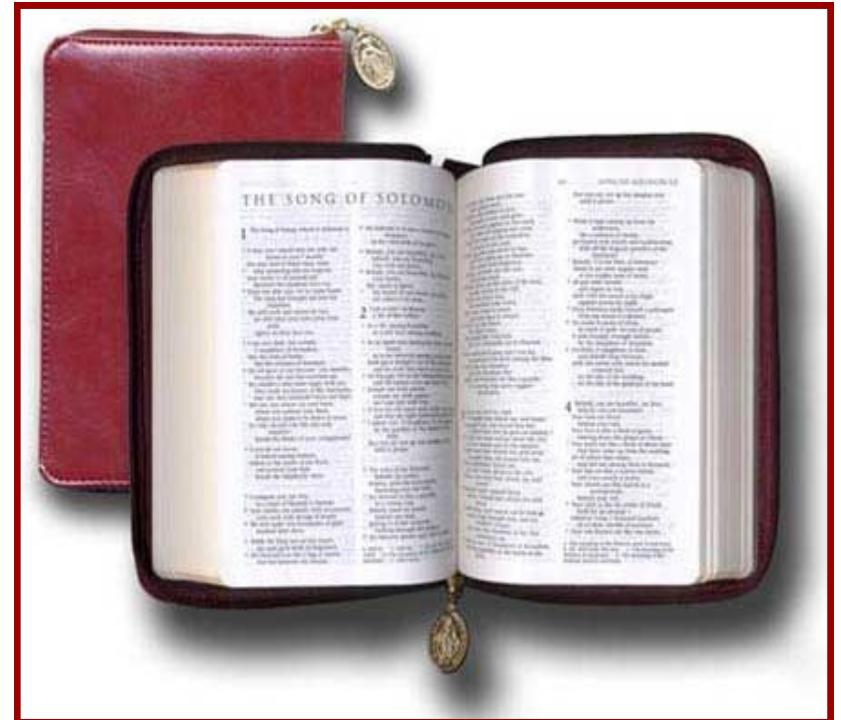




## ***SONG OF SONGS—9***

***(SONG OF SOLOMON)***



***THE HOLY SPIRIT:  
THE KISS OF THE MOUTH***

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*The Song of Songs is the story of the love between God and the soul. God is deeply in love with us, and wills our love in return. This love between the soul and God, which is the most intimate love possible, is expressed in the analogy of the bride (the Church) and the bridegroom (Jesus), where the intimacy of love is especially expressed. Commentary on the Song of Songs is presented by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and takes the form of sermons on the meaning of the various allegories used in the psalms and are presented in the order Saint Bernard composed the commentaries. Introductory comments are made by the Early Church Fathers.*

### **The Holy Spirit: the Kiss of the Mouth**

As I promised yesterday, and as you well remember, today we are to speak of the supreme kiss, that of the mouth. You must listen with more than usual attention to a theme that is sweet to the spirit above all others, that is so rare an experience and more difficult to understand. I think I should begin by considering the higher truths, and it seems to me that a kiss past comprehension, beyond the experience of any mere creature, was designated by him who said: "No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." For the Father loves the Son whom he embraces with a love that is unique; he who is infinite embraces his equal, who is eternal, his co-eternal the sole God, his only-begotten. But the Son's bond with him is not less affectionate, for it led him even to death, as he himself testifies: "That all might know that I love the Father, rise, let us go." And he went forth, as we know, to his passion. Now, that mutual knowledge and love between him who begets and him who is begotten -- what can it comprise if not a kiss that is utterly sweet, but utterly a mystery as well?

2. For my part I am convinced that no creature, not even an angel, is permitted to comprehend this secret of divine love, so holy and so august. Does not Paul proclaim from his own experience that this is a peace which passes all understanding, even that of the angels? And hence the bride, although otherwise so audacious, does not dare to say: "Let him kiss me with his mouth," for she knows that this is the prerogative of the Father alone. What she does ask for is something less: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." Do you wish to see the newly-chosen bride receiving this unprecedented kiss, given not by the mouth but by the kiss of the mouth? Then look at Jesus in the presence of his Apostles: "He breathed on them," according to St John, "and he said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' " That favor, given to the newly-chosen Church, was indeed a kiss. That? you say. That corporeal breathing? O no, but rather the invisible Spirit, who is so bestowed in that breath of the Lord that he is understood to proceed from him equally as from the Father, truly the kiss that is common both to him who kisses and to him who is kissed. Hence the bride is satisfied to receive the kiss of the Bridegroom, though she be not kissed with his mouth. For her it is no mean or contemptible thing to be kissed by the kiss, because it is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit. If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.

9. Felicitous, however, is this kiss of participation that enables us not only to know God but to love the Father, who is never fully known until he is perfectly loved. Are there not surely some among you who at certain times perceive deep within their hearts the Spirit of the Son exclaiming: "Abba, Father"? Let that man who feels that he is moved by the same Spirit as the Son, let him know that he too is loved by the Father. Whoever he be let him be of good heart, let his confidence never waver. Living in the Spirit of the Son, let such a soul recognize herself as a daughter of the Father, a bride or even a sister of the Son, for you will find that the soul who enjoys this privilege is called by either of these names. Nor will it cost me much to prove it, the proof is ready to hand. They are the names by which the Bridegroom addresses her: "I come into my garden, my sister, my bride." She is his sister because they have the one Father; his bride because joined in the one Spirit. For if marriage according to the flesh constitutes two in one body, why should not a spiritual union be even more efficacious in joining two in one spirit? And hence anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. But we have witness too from the Father, how lovingly and how courteously he gives her the name of daughter, and nevertheless invites her as his daughter-in-law to the sweet caresses of his Son: "Listen, daughter, pay careful attention: forget your nation and your ancestral home, then the king will fall in love with your beauty." See then from whom this bride demands a kiss. O soul called to holiness, make sure that your attitude is respectful, for he is the Lord your God, who perhaps ought not to be kissed, but rather adored with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

**END OF SONG OF SONGS — 9**

7. But I feel that one of you may now want to say: "What voice thundered forth to you a secret that, you insist, was made known to no creature?" Unhesitatingly I answer: "It is the only Son, who is in the Father's bosom who has made it known." But he has made it known, I will say, not to the sorry and unworthy creature that I am, but to John, the Bridegroom's friend, whose words these are; and not only to him but to John the Evangelist also, the disciple Jesus loved. For his soul was pleasing to the Lord, entirely worthy both of the name and the dowry of a bride, worthy of the Bridegroom's embraces, worthy that is, of leaning back on Jesus' breast. John imbibed from the heart of the only-begotten Son what he in turn had imbibed from the Father. Nor is John the only one, it is true also of all to whom the Angel of the Great Counsel said: "I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father." Paul drank of it, because the Good News he preached is not a human message nor did he receive it through men, it is something he learned only through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

All of these indeed could say with felicity and truth: "It is the only Son who is in the Father's bosom who has made it known to us." And this revelation -- what can you call it but a kiss? But it was the kiss of the kiss, not of the mouth. Listen if you will know what the kiss of the mouth is: "The Father and I are one;" and again: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." This is a kiss from mouth to mouth, beyond the claim of any creature. It is a kiss of love and of peace, but of the love which is beyond all knowledge and that peace which is so much greater than we can understand. The truth is that the things that no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, were revealed to Paul by God through his Spirit, that is, through him who is the kiss of his mouth. That the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son signifies the kiss of the mouth. But the kiss of the kiss we discover when we read: "Instead of the spirit of the world, we have received the Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us."

8. But we must make a clearer distinction between the two. He who received the fullness is given the kiss of the mouth, but he who received from the fullness is given the kiss of the kiss. Paul was certainly a great man, but no matter how high he should aim in making the offer of his mouth, even if he were to raise himself right into the third heaven," he would still of necessity find himself remote from the lips of the Most High. He must abide content within the limits of his capacity, and since he cannot of himself reach that glorious countenance, let him humbly ask that it may lean down to him, that, the kiss be transmitted from on high. He however who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, since he could dare to say: "The Father and I are one," because he was joined to him as an equal and embraced him as an equal -- he does not beg for a kiss from an inferior position; rather on equally sublime heights mouth is joined to mouth, and by a prerogative that is unique he receives the kiss from the mouth. For Christ therefore, the kiss meant a totality, for Paul only a participation; Christ rejoiced in the kiss of the mouth, Paul only in that he was kissed by the kiss.

3. He it is then who inspires the daring spirit of the bride, he it is whom she trustingly petitions to come to her under the guise of a kiss. But this boldness in her request is justified by something that she knows. For when the Son said: "No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son," he added: "and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." But the bride has no doubt that if he will reveal himself to anybody, it will be to her. Therefore, she dares to ask for this kiss, actually for that Spirit in whom both the Father and the Son will reveal themselves to her. For it is not possible that one of these could be known without the other. That is why Christ said: "To have seen me is to have seen the Father;" and John in his turn: "No one who has the Father can deny the Son, and to acknowledge the Son is to have the Father as well." From these declarations it is clearly evident that the Father cannot be known apart from the Son, nor the Son apart from the Father. Rightly therefore did Christ point out that one achieves supreme happiness not by knowing any one of them, but by knowing both, when he said: "Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." As a consequence, those who follow the Lamb are said to have his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads," which is to be glorified by this twofold knowledge.

4. But one of you may interpose and say: "Therefore knowledge of the Holy Spirit is not necessary, because when he said eternal life consisted of the knowledge of the Father and Son, he did not mention the Holy Spirit." True enough; but where there is perfect knowledge of the Father and the Son, how can there be ignorance of the goodness of both; which is the Holy Spirit? For no man has a complete knowledge of another until he finds out whether his will be good or evil. So, although it has been said: "Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent," still, if that act of mission demonstrates the good pleasure both of the Father lovingly sending his Son and of the Son freely obeying the Father, then the Holy Spirit is not passed over in complete silence, for he is implied in the mention of so immense a grace. The Holy Spirit indeed is nothing else but the love and the benign goodness of them both.

5. When the bride asks for the kiss therefore, she asks to be filled with the grace of this threefold knowledge, filled to the utmost capacity of mortal flesh. But it is the Son whom she approaches, since it is by him it is to be revealed, and to whom he wills. He reveals himself therefore, and the Father as well, to whom it pleases him. And it is certain that he makes this revelation through the kiss, that is, through the Holy Spirit, a fact to which St Paul bears witness: "These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit." It is by giving the Spirit, through whom he reveals, that he shows us himself; he reveals in the gift, his gift is in the revealing. Furthermore, this revelation which is made through the Holy Spirit, not only conveys the light of knowledge but also lights the fire of love, as St Paul again testifies: "The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us."

And that is perhaps the reason why, in the case of those who, knowing God, yet refused to honor him as God, we do not read that they knew by a revelation of the Holy Spirit; for even though they possessed knowledge they did not love. As St Paul states: "God has shown himself to them," but he does not add: "through the Holy Spirit," lest those impious minds should usurp to themselves the kiss of the bride. They were content with the knowledge that gives self-importance, but ignorant of the love that makes the building grow. The apostle actually tells us the means by which they knew; they perceived him in the things that he had made. From all this it is clear that even their knowledge was not perfect, because they did not love. For if their knowledge had been complete, they would not have been blind to that goodness by which he willed to be born a human being, and to die for their sins. Just listen to what was revealed about God to them: "his everlasting power and deity," says St Paul. As you see, they in their presumption of spirit -- their own spirit, not God's -- studied his attributes of sublimity and majesty. That he was gentle and humble in heart they failed to understand. Nor must we be surprised at this, because we read of their leader, Behemoth, that he beholds everything that is high, nothing that is humble. On the contrary David did not walk among great things nor in wonders above himself; he would not be a searcher of majesty lest he be overwhelmed by glory.

6. You too, if you would make prudent progress in your studies of the mysteries of the faith, would do well to remember the Wise Man's advice: "Do not try to understand things that are too difficult for you, or try to discover what is beyond your powers." These are occasions when you must walk by the Spirit and not according to your personal opinions, for the Spirit teaches not by sharpening curiosity but by inspiring charity. And hence the bride, when seeking him whom her heart loves, quite properly does not put her trust in mere human prudence, nor yield to the inane conceits of human curiosity. She asks rather for a kiss, that is she calls upon the Holy Spirit by whom she is simultaneously awarded with the choice repast of knowledge and the seasoning of grace. How true it is that the knowledge imparted in the kiss is lovingly received, since the kiss is love's own token. But knowledge which leads to self-importance, since it is devoid of love, cannot be the fruit of the kiss. Even those who have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, may not for any reason lay claim to that kiss. For the favor of the kiss bears with it a twofold gift, the light of knowledge and the fervor of devotion. He is in truth the Spirit of wisdom and insight, who, like the bee carrying its burden of wax and honey, is fully equipped with the power both of kindling the light of knowledge and infusing the delicious nurture of grace. Two kinds of people therefore may not consider themselves to have been gifted with the kiss, those who know the truth without loving it, and those who love it without understanding it; from which we conclude that this kiss leaves room neither for ignorance nor for lukewarmness.

So therefore, let the bride about to receive the twofold grace of this most holy kiss set her two lips in readiness, her reason for the gift of insight, her will for that of wisdom, so that overflowing with joy in the fullness of this kiss, she may be privileged to hear the words: "Your lips are moist with grace, for God has blessed you forever."

Thus the Father, when he kisses the Son, pours into him the plenitude of the mysteries of his divine being, breathing forth love's deep delight, as symbolized in the words of the psalm: "Day to day pours forth speech." As has already been stated, no creature whatsoever has been privileged to comprehend the secret of this eternal, blessed and unique embrace; the Holy Spirit alone is the sole witness and confidant of their mutual knowledge and love. For who could ever know the mind of the Lord, or who could be his counselor?