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Frog-Kisser

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Frog-kisser

A priest gave a homily on the occasion of a younger priest's first celebration of the Eucharist. He got everyone's attention, and drew many smiles, by declaring that the main duty or vocation of the new priest was to be a "frog-kisser." The image might have resonances for many of us.

The one who "kisses the frog" has to have faith that the other person is truly beautiful, though he or she appears to be ugly. Parents usually have no trouble seeing their little children as wholly beautiful. Later, if the children become rebellious, contentious, and dress and act in a manner that their parents see as less than lovely, mothers and fathers must rely on their faith that the beauty of their children is still present, but hidden. When teachers encounter difficult students, they can only treat them as worthy of attention by considering the possibilities of the developing humanity that might lie hidden behind a disturbed and disturbing exterior.

What do we believe about others? Our view of those about us might be influenced by what we see in the mirror. If some people saw beauty in us when we felt like ugly frogs, and expressed their belief in what we could become, or what we could do, we probably had experience of a "frog-kisser." Most of our ability to see beyond immediate appearances to the beauty of another person is made possible by those who believed in us when we could not. If the person we see in the mirror is acceptable to us, we will be able to accept others.

One excellent practice that enables us to become better "frog-kissers" is to reflect on some of those experiences in our past when we felt awkward, when we were perhaps less than confident about taking a risk in the direction of growth, and received encouragement from some one. We might not enjoy remembering some of the embarrassment we felt that kept us from joining a club, or introducing ourselves to some new people at school. But if we can also recall when someone told us that we would be a good speaker, or soccer player, or singer, and we responded with joy, we will have recovered one of those experiences that brought us to believe in ourselves.

The original story about the frog turning into a handsome prince is a pleasant fantasy, delightful to imagine. But the reality for most of us has not been that of magically changing from ugliness to beauty, but of having come to believe in the capabilities we already had, the humanity that was hidden from our awareness. The "frog-kissers" in

our lives provided moments of inspiration so that we might take courage, and act according to the God-given gifts and potentialities that lay within. Most of us, when we are honest, can acknowledge that we have more "warts" than any frog, yet we are happy to be living and loving just as we are, with strengths and weaknesses. The transformation we experienced was interior, enabling us to participate in life actively and effectively, each with our own limitations, foibles, and idiosyncrasies.

The vocation of "frog-kisser" does not require civic or ecclesiastical licensing or approval. Three steps are needed by way of preparation: The first is to reflect on one's past, to recover one or more moments of having been "kissed" by a "frog-kisser." The second is to look beyond the visible flaws or limitations of someone you know or meet. And the third is to consider the beauty that is most likely present in that person. If you then see in someone a capability that you can and want to encourage, you are surely called to act as a "frog-kisser."