

The taste of memory

By [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

November 9, 2012

We celebrated both sons' [baptism anniversaries](#) a few weeks back. Their days are only a fortnight apart, so in the blur of busy schedules we set aside a single night to [celebrate and remember](#).

As I was setting the table for their special dinner, my son snatched his baptism candle out of its holder and playfully held it in front of his mouth as if to bite. Coyly offering one of his beloved kidisms, he teased: "Does it taste?"

He offers this phrase about anything he knows he's not supposed to eat, as he watches his younger brother jam everything into his mouth. No, we shake our heads – books and crayons and blocks and chalk *do not* taste. Food is the only thing that tastes.

But as I smiled and chided him with the response he craved, I caught the half-truth in my words. Dinner and dessert were not the only things that night that would taste. The anniversaries we celebrated tasted, too. The chew of communion bread before the baptism, the crumble of cake at the party after. Even the earthy chrism oil that lingered on my lips when I kissed my baby's forehead, slick from the sacred smear. All of it tastes.

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I thought about taste as we passed the pasta that night, snuck extra helpings of dessert and savored memories of special days. Anniversaries do indeed taste, some bitter, some sweet.

There are wedding days we remember, the festive dates we celebrate with happy memory of cake and champagne and crying at "I do." There are death dates, the dreaded days when we don't know what to do with ourselves but call up someone else who loved them, too, and simply sit with each other in the sad strangeness.

All sorts of anniversaries mark our calendars: jobs started, homes bought, trips made, degrees earned. And all of them taste. We notice the date, circle it on the calendar, and all at once we're flooded with thick memories of the sight, sound, smell, touch, taste of what the day held.

But exactly what is the taste of anniversary? Is it the cake and candles, the silver and china, the special sacred of set-apart? Or is it the deeper memory of the most-important moments that mark our lives - the births and deaths and gains and losses whose tastes are imprinted so firmly in our minds we almost salivate as we remember.

I think of the dinner I gobbled down after bringing my first baby home from the hospital, how delicious the simple saute tasted when my mom heaped it over steaming pasta: it tasted like love.

I remember the cellophane-wrapped cinnamon rolls that my younger brothers and I unwrapped together in the kitchen the day after our brother's funeral: it tasted like grief.

I return to the last Thanksgiving my family held in my grandparents' home after both had died, the stories and laughter and tears we passed with dishes and wine round the table: it tasted like clan.

Maybe it's a [reverse Proust](#): memory that jogs taste, and not the other way around. But all of the anniversaries that remain retain their own particular flavor.

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My cheeky boy who asks each day what tastes is now nearing the age when my first fuzzy memories emerged, the shadowy snippets that a young mind seizes: a play of light upon the nursery floor, a scoop into beloved arms. I wonder what his earliest memory will be, how it will taste as he savors it over and over.

It will be only one of a lifetime full of anniversaries and every-days that linger in his mind's eye. But that first taste will teach him how to remember: with senses wide open.

Originally posted at [Mothering Spirit](#)