



Tom McCarthy Jr. | Catholic Review Oct. 18, 2012

Ravens rookie kicker Justin Tucker takes his faith seriously on and off the field.

Ravens rookie talks faith and football

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Baltimore Ravens rookie Justin Tucker may be turning heads for hitting 12 out of 13 field goal attempts this season, but that's not all the 22-year-old University of Texas graduate is doing that's drawing attention on the field. Since his high school playing days, Tucker has made it a point to make the sign of the cross before each kick.

"More than anything, it's just to give glory and say thanks for the opportunity," explained the six-foot-tall, 180-pound kicker. "Not many people get to do what I do ... and in college even fewer. And now only 32 guys get to do what I do. I'm just ever thankful for the opportunity whenever it presents itself. I really just ask more than anything that God's will be done, and I'm happy with it."

While he is described by teammates as goofy, silly, "good weird," a live wire and a character, Tucker also comes across as humble and grateful. "I would describe him as a good kicker first of all," said coach John Harbaugh during an Oct. 10 press conference at the Under Armour Performance Center in Owings Mills. "That's probably the number one criteria. That's why he fits in the locker room because the guys appreciate his talent."

Standing at the edge of the Ravens' practice field, his hands shoved into the pockets of a grey Ravens sweatshirt, Tucker said he thinks it's one of the coolest things the Ravens do to offer both a Catholic Mass and a chapel service at the team hotel each week before games. Father Christopher Whatley, pastor of St. Mark in Catonsville, celebrates Mass for the home games.

Even at a young age, Tucker found himself relying on his faith. "I was in fifth grade and my best friend at the time passed away in a plane crash," he said. "That was my first experience really with the death of someone I was close to. A verse in the Bible mentions child-like faith and I really experienced it. I try to carry that same feeling with me every new day. In a sense, I'm thankful for my experiences through that. It's really kind of an opportunity to grow in faith."

Earlier this year, Tucker was inspired after attending Mass at the predominantly black Holy Cross Church in Austin, Texas, where parishioners were standing up and clapping. "You know people say the word 'celebrate' so casually," he said, "but Mass is a celebration. It should be a party in there." Faith and family seem to go hand-in-hand for the kicker, who wears No. 9. "I'm a big believer, because of my experience growing up, that the family that prays together stays together," he said. "And we like to have fun too."

His mother, Michelle Tucker, is proud that her son has carried his faith with him wherever he goes. “Our faith and specifically, our Catholic faith means a lot to our entire family,” she said via email. “As his mom (and very ardent Catholic), it warms my heart to no end that he is able to celebrate Mass before each game! What a gift that is and what a gift this entire Ravens NFL program is that they offer that to their players. When I heard that, I was so taken by the wonderful people my son has surrounded himself with and I am humbled and so grateful. Justin certainly made a very wise decision to play for THIS team.” Tucker’s parents and his girlfriend’s family were in town for the Dallas game Oct. 14. And although Tucker grew up supporting the Cowboys, he said, “obviously now my allegiances have changed and I am a 100 percent Ravens fan.” Tucker said his teammates are a good group of guys.

“Everybody seems to have a smile on their face at any point in the day,” he said. “I think that’s why we’re good on the field too. We have fun playing football.” Since he joined the Ravens this season, Tucker has earned points for both his kicks and his personality. “I mean the guy sings Italian opera in front of our players,” Harbaugh said. “So if you’re an Italian opera person that’s probably pretty normal. A lot of our guys, they see it a little different in the football culture. But we love him. He’s ours.”

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