

Bless Me, Father

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A Full-Length Comedy by Andy Rassler

Suspensions and innuendo reign as a new parishioner joins the parish quilting group. Who is this new woman? What is her agenda? And what is going on between her and the parish priest?

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## CHARACTERS:

All characters are aged 60s or above.

IDA	Strong, vindictive, ambitious
JEAN	Ida's right-hand woman for as long as anyone can remember
HELEN	Smart, crafty and a bit mysterious
TRUDY	Conflicted, confused, stressed
BEATRICE	Wanting allegiance with someone. Anyone.
FLORA	No-nonsense
AGNES	Wheel-chair bound and not really "here." Or is she?
FATHER PAUL	Cautious, genuine. Tries to be the best priest he can be.

ACT I, Scene 1

An office in a church rectory. Father Paul is busy at work, writing a sermon. There are books open on his desk and he appears to be taking notes. There is a knock on the door. FATHER PAUL doesn't look up from his work. (Note: It's important that FATHER is wearing his priest collar here. Audience must know he's a priest!)

FATHER PAUL

It's open. Come on in.

HELEN

(peeking in)  
I'm not interrupting?

FATHER PAUL

No—

FATHER PAUL looks up and is stunned to see HELEN at the door. There is a moment of stillness as she smiles at him and he just stares.

FATHER PAUL

Oh, my dear! You...came.

HELEN

You asked me to come, remember?

FATHER PAUL

Of course, yes. Of course.

HELEN

You weren't expecting me.

FATHER PAUL

Not this soon. You said you had to think about it. That there was a lot to think about.

HELEN

There is a lot to think about.

FATHER PAUL

But you came. You're here.

HELEN

I can't imagine being anywhere but here.

FATHER PAUL

It just—I—I can't tell you what it means to me.

FATHER PAUL and HELEN hug warmly. He moves in for a kiss and she pulls away.

HELEN

Paul, maybe we shouldn't—here.

FATHER PAUL

Okay, yes. You're right. (change gears) You must be exhausted. Let me get a room ready here in the rectory for you.

HELEN

Oh, no! I don't think that's a good idea at all. I already booked a hotel room.

FATHER PAUL

A hotel room? I want you—I think I might need you closer to me.

HELEN

The hotel isn't that far. You have to think about how this is going to look.

FATHER PAUL

I know. You're right.

A moment where neither person knows what to say or where to go from here.

HELEN

So.

FATHER PAUL

So. (pause, takes her by the shoulders) Let me take a good look at you. Turn around. (She does) Ah, you're a sight for sore eyes, you know. So beautiful.

HELEN

Oh, here we go, flatterer.

FATHER PAUL

Well, you are. I've always thought so.

HELEN

(crosses away to his desk and sees his sermon)  
I know. And I've always loved you for it. (looks at sermon) Preparing for Sunday?

FATHER PAUL

Seems I'm always working on the next sermon.

HELEN

Anything in this one about truth and/or honesty?

FATHER PAUL

Helen, my heart tells me this is the right thing to do.

HELEN

How can your heart tell you that?

FATHER PAUL

I need you, Helen.

HELEN

Wow. Well. In a very strange way, I need you, too, Paul.

Another big hug. He kisses her hands.

FATHER PAUL

I love you.

HELEN

I love you, too. (re-directing) So, what are we going to tell your flock, dear Father Paul? What's my official story?

FATHER PAUL

Why do they need to know anything?

HELEN

If they're anything like any other people I know anywhere in the world, they're going to need a story.

FATHER PAUL

But why?

HELEN

I'll be going to mass. I am still Catholic, crazy as that may sound.

FATHER PAUL

It doesn't sound crazy at all. I know you're involved with your church. Well, you were involved, anyway, at your last church.

HELEN

Yes, well, when people see new people at church, they naturally ask questions. Especially if said person seems friendly with the priest. We'll be seen together often, Paul. It's part of what we're doing here.

FATHER PAUL

You're being silly.

HELEN

I know what I'm talking about.

FATHER PAUL

I'm putting you on the altar tomorrow.

HELEN

Oh, now I don't think that's a good idea at all.

FATHER PAUL

If I just incorporate you right in, they won't suspect anything at all.

HELEN

Or they'll suspect everything.

FATHER PAUL

How can there be suspicion about a person serving a ministry?

HELEN

A new person?

FATHER PAUL

I'm doing it. I know my congregation. There are a few brick walls, but that's true anywhere. This is the right call.

HELEN

It's against my better judgment--

FATHER PAUL

You're giving out communion tomorrow.

HELEN

And all hell will break loose. You mark my words.

FATHER PAUL

(at notebook again)

I will mark them. But you're wrong. An eyelash or two will bat, an eyebrow will arch...and that's it.

HELEN

You forgot about the tongues wagging.

FATHER PAUL

Let them talk. I don't care. I need you.

HELEN

I know. I hope you know what you're doing.

FATHER PAUL

I have no idea what we're doing. But we have to have faith, Helen.

HELEN

I do, Paul. I do have faith, but—I'm scared. Aren't you scared?

FATHER PAUL

Of course I'm scared. But you're here now. We're together.

HELEN

Yes, we're together. Here we are, stirring up trouble again.

FATHER PAUL

We're not stirring up anything. Helen, we'll be okay.

HELEN

I hate those generalizations. I don't even know what 'being okay' means.

FATHER PAUL

The Lord will provide, Helen. He'll see us through this. He knows our hearts.

HELEN

Well, we're going to need him, Paul. This—none of this—is going to be easy.

FATHER PAUL

One day at a time.

HELEN

(singing the old song)  
One day at a time sweet Jesus  
That's all I'm asking from you.  
Just give me the strength  
To do everyday what I have to do.

FATHER PAUL

We'll have to get you signed up for the choir, too.

HELEN

Slow down, Paul. Just—slow down.

FATHER PAUL

I know. But now that you're here, I just want everything to happen at once.

HELEN

Doesn't the Bible say something somewhere about patience being a virtue?

FATHER PAUL

Not one of my strong suits.

HELEN

We all have our faults, Paul.

FATHER PAUL

Some more than others.

HELEN

Amen to that. (heading to the door) Well, I'd love to stay longer but the drive was long and my bed is calling.

FATHER PAUL

Are you sure about the hotel? Absolutely certain?

HELEN

Absolutely. I'll see you in the morning.

FATHER PAUL

See me in the morning?

HELEN



I have to go the hotel.

FATHER PAUL

Alone? You didn't drive all this way to spend the night alone. I'm coming with you.

HELEN

Paul, we just talked about slowing down. Patience.

FATHER PAUL

But you're here now. Why should you be alone?

HELEN

You have your sermon to finish.

FATHER PAUL

I'll take it with me. Maybe you can help me with it.

HELEN

(laughing)  
God forbid.

FATHER PAUL

I can just ride over with you.

HELEN

But then I'd have to drive you back here again. You know I don't like to drive in the dark.

FATHER PAUL

I'll throw a few things in a bag and stay the night.

HELEN

No. Paul, that is a very, very bad idea.

FATHER PAUL

No one will even know! My car is here, they'll assume I'm here. We'll drive back over early—take separate cars to mass.

HELEN

Paul...

FATHER PAUL

Please, Helen. Now that you're here, I just can't bear the thought of being so far from you. It doesn't have to be every night. Just tonight. Please?

HELEN

Well—

FATHER PAUL

You don't me with you?

HELEN

Oh, you know that's not it.

FATHER PAUL

Then let's stop complicating everything. It's really very simple: You drove all this way, neither one of us wants to spend the night alone, so I'm coming. Period.

HELEN

I never could beat you in an argument.

FATHER PAUL

Or in chess. But I often cheated.

HELEN

Oh, so the truth comes out!

FATHER PAUL

(as he's exiting to get his overnight bag)  
It always does, my dear!

HELEN

(looking after him with a worried look)  
Yes it does, doesn't it? (she looks to the sky and sings a little bit of 'One Day at a Time' under her breath as she gathers her purse/whatnots)

FATHER PAUL re-enters with a small bag.

HELEN

That didn't take you long.

FATHER PAUL

Overnight only. Toothbrush, jammies, slippers, change of underwear.

HELEN

Okay, okay. I assume you know how to pack your own bag. And we're setting the alarm for very early!

FATHER PAUL

Mass is at 8am. We'll set the alarm for 5:30. Remember? Rise early, pray often—

HELEN

--Live in peace—

BOTH

Share God's love.

HELEN

We're doing this?

FATHER PAUL

We are doing this.

HELEN

God help us.

HELEN exits. FATHER PAUL stays behind one more second to lock the door. Right before he leaves he takes one last look around:

FATHER PAUL

God help us.

FATHER PAUL exits. BLACKOUT. END OF SCENE.

## ACT 1, Scene 2

FLORA pushes AGNES' wheelchair in the room and turns on the lights. It is directly after daily mass.

FLORA

Agnes, dear, you roll yourself on over to the table while I get the coffee going for the rest of the girls. Can you do that, dear?

AGNES

That's bullshit!

FLORA

Yes, well, blessedly your latest mantra didn't blast itself out at mass today. We all said a little prayer of thanks for that one, didn't we?

FLORA heads to the coffee counter.

AGNES slowly but surely rolls herself to the table.

FLORA

Not much of a sermon today, wouldn't you say, dear? I understand the dear father can't knock it out of the park every single day, but I guess I was hoping for more. I mean, there's a lot of ammunition with 'When you pray, do not do as the hypocrites do...'

AGNES

That's bullshit!

FLORA

Absolutely, Agnes...oh, now, where are those coffee filters? I just used them yesterday, but they're not where I left them.

IDA

(as she is entering, talking over her shoulder)

Jean, we'd better get a move on if we're going to finish those two quilts today!

FLORA

(to AGNES)

Speaking of filters. Or lack thereof. (as IDA enters) Oh, there you are, Ida. Do you have any idea where the coffee filters have gone? They were right here.

IDA

Oh, where does anything go around here? I don't ever make the coffee, so I don't guess I know.

AGNES

That's bullshit!

IDA

Agnes! That little tick hasn't left us, eh?

FLORA

I'm afraid not. She doesn't seem to have any control over it.

IDA

Mm-hmm.

JEAN enters.

IDA

Well, there you are! I thought I'd have to haul everything out myself.

JEAN

Well, nature was calling. I thought I should take care of that before I tried to lift anything. I don't want to depend on my Depends that much, you know.

IDA starts to pull out the quilting materials as the dialogue continues. After JEAN greets AGNES, she helps, too.

FLORA

Smart woman!

JEAN

Good morning, Agnes! Uplifting mass today, wasn't it?

AGNES

That's bullshit!

JEAN

Well, she's not pulling any punches today, is she?

IDA

Speaking of mass, do either of you know who that woman was who decided she could be the Eucharistic minister this morning?

JEAN

I've not seen her before. I assume she's new.

IDA

She's brand new and she just steps in to administer communion?

FLORA

I'm sure Father approved it.

IDA

Just like that? Just approves her?

FLORA

What's wrong with that?

IDA

Nothing. Nothing. I just like to be informed when new things are happening.

JEAN

New things? You mean any things.

IDA

Okay.

FLORA

Well, I'm informing you, Ida, that the coffee filters have been found.

IDA

Are you being smart with me?

FLORA

Just letting you know. One pot leaded and one unleaded?

IDA

Like always. You don't think she'll come over here today, do you?

JEAN

Who, the new woman?

IDA

No, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Yes, the new woman. Did anyone get her name?

FLORA

No, I came right in here to get coffee going after mass.

JEAN

Do you not want her to join us?

IDA

It's not that. We've just got to finish these two quilts and I don't have time to train in somebody new.

FLORA

Well, we could always use another pair of hands around here.

IDA

Of course, Flora! I'm not arguing that!

AGNES

That's bullshit!

IDA

Will you please get that woman some coffee and a donut? Maybe if she's eating and drinking, she won't spout out those ridiculous obscenities.

FLORA

It's brewing. Where are Trudy and Beatrice? Aren't they coming today?

IDA

They'd better be coming. We've got to--

JEAN

-finish those two quilts, yes, we know. Trudy was in the restroom when I was. She said she was coming.

IDA

Oh, they're probably gassing with Father in the narthex. You'd think Father would sprint in the other direction when those two approach, as much as they chatter on.

FLORA

Yes, it's a good thing we all don't talk as much as they do.

IDA

Is that you being smart again?

FLORA

(ignoring, bringing coffee to AGNES)

Here you go, Agnes. Your morning coffee and plain donut. (AGNES just looks at the coffee.) Oh, you're right. I forgot the cream. You'd think by now I'd have it all memorized.

TRUDY and BEATRICE enter with HELEN.

BEATRICE

I was just telling Trudy the other day we need new volunteers around here. We're all getting so burned out! We're so happy to have you, Helen!

HELEN

Thank you so much! It already feels like home here.

TRUDY

Everyone—if you haven't had a chance to meet her, this is our new parishioner Helen Dawkins from Ohio. Helen, this is Flora, Ida, Jean and Agnes.

HELEN

I'm so pleased to meet you all.

AGNES

That's bullshit!

HELEN

Oh...I...

FLORA

Our apologies, Helen. Agnes has a bit of Alzheimer's and an interesting verbal tick that surfaces now and again. Nothing personal.

IDA

Not at all. So, Helen is it? You seem very comfortable on the altar.

HELEN

I served many ministries at my church. My former church.

JEAN

And what brings you here?

HELEN

I'm afraid it's not a very interesting story.

IDA

We'll be the judge of that.

JEAN

Ida—

IDA

What?

HELEN

My husband died--recently. I moved here to be closer to my daughter and her kids. End of story. See? Not very interesting.



IDA

Oh, there's more than that.

HELEN

You think so?

IDA

What about your involvement in your former church?

HELEN

Well, I did wear many hats there. I was a Eucharistic minister, lector, sacristan, I lead a Bible study group, was on the liturgy committee—

BEATRICE

--And she was in the quilting group!

IDA

Well, my goodness, ship her off to Rome to run for Pope.

JEAN

Ida--

TRUDY

Would you like coffee before we get started?

HELEN

I would love some. Thank you, Trudy.

IDA

Trudy, can you help us get the quilts set out? I'm sure Helen is capable of getting her own coffee.

TRUDY

Oh, I—

HELEN

Of course.

TRUDY

Okay.

FLORA

It's over here, Helen. I'll show you where everything is.

BEATRICE

Maybe Helen can help us finish the backing on the quilts we're supposed to finish today?

HELEN

I would love to—

IDA

Oh, just jumping in like that probably isn't a good idea. Helen, I've got a much better idea. Why don't you get some of those containers of scraps and sort out the fabric so we can use it for our next project?

FLORA

Ida, don't you think—

IDA

She hasn't been here to work on these. Jean, let's get to work.

TRUDY

I'm sure she's perfectly capable—

IDA

Of sorting fabric, yes, I'm sure she is. Ladies, there are two quilts waiting to be finished. Jean and I will be finishing the backing on these. The rest of you do what you'd like.