

Marcinkus

a one man play



by
Tom Flannery
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LIGHTS – Archbishop Paul Marcinkus is kneeling stage left on a kneeler representing the confessional. Surrounding him are lit church candles and the like. Center stage is a desk with assorted books and papers strewn about. A pipe and some tobacco are close at hand. A bookshelf is nearby stage right, and noticeable on one shelf are a few bottles of booze, some glasses, and an ice bucket.

He is a large, burly man....very much rough around the edges. His cassock is rumpled and frayed and this, combined with his size, give him a somewhat sinister appearance. He is clearly a man not to be trifled with.

Bless me father, for I have....*(nervously clears throat)*sinned. It's been *(noticing the audience for the first time...and addressing them)*...oh. Hello. Good timing you have. Eavesdropping on the confessional was one of the things we'd joke about as young kids studying to be priests. It's something everybody thinks about....just like wanting to be able to sit in a chair in the back of the room at your own funeral. To take notes. It's never too late to learn something. And this is coming from an old man.

(beat...thinking about what he just said...)

Well.....that's what I was anyway. Now I'm.....*(looking down at himself)* this.

February 20th 2006....that's when I died. The mind was able but the flesh was weak as they say. Just turned 84. Statistically I guess it was time....but I was never good with the numbers. So....I just ignore the unpleasantness of it all and proceed as if I'm still here.

I need more time anyway....*(looking around)* and it looks like I've gotten it.

(Beat. Lets this sink in. Then, excited again for the chance to talk)

But you bow your head in there and it's like turning on a switch that starts your mouth, and pretty soon you're saying things that you never intended to. And I'm no different. As a priest I've got my sins too. Don't always want to share 'em either...I mean...they *are* mine. *(laughs)*

"Oh", we'd say. "The time it would save in preparing the homily!" It's one thing to anticipate the acts of sinners. It's another to know exactly what they are. A good judge of the homily was the attendance at the next scheduled confession. I'd have 'em wrapped around the block some days. You could get some to admit things they'd never done. The fear of God does strange things to people. Fear is good though. It keeps you awake...and when you're awake nobody can sneak up on you.

(takes a moment to light up his pipe....)

(quietly, almost to himself) Better than incense....*(chuckles)* and what harm can it do me

now?

But you know....we're humans right? Or at least you still are. And you still choose to tell God what you think is his business to know. I've come to realize that maybe there's things we've done that aren't even *His* business. And you know....maybe he knows everything, and then again maybe he doesn't. I've never met the man personally...see?

I do plan on it though. As soon as I can get out of.....*(pause...looks around)* here.

May I speak in the present tense? It makes me feel more....well....*alive (laughs)*

As long as I've been out here in Sun City Arizona it seems *everybody* wants to talk to me. They come knocking on my door....and I had to tell my secretary that I wasn't available to talk to anyone who wanted to ask me questions. You can come to say hello. You can come on a spiritual matter. If you're having a crisis of faith, you can come. She's been with me for years now...my secretary. She knows who's legit and who is not. I'm just an old parish priest now, and the sun is setting. I think enough about my past when I'm watching it go down. I don't want to sit with somebody *else* who's thinking about my past too. Think about your own past.

Right?

But I don't think you're here to judge me. You didn't come knocking on my door with a pen and paper...and I have no idea how many of you are even Catholics really. In the old days you could tell just by looking at someone.

No more. We blend in more. Maybe that's a good thing. *(laughs)* I don't know.

Much has been written about me. Some of it is even true. I read it all. Everybody likes to read about themselves. If they tell you otherwise they're lying. Strange though. I'm known the world over....but I can walk down the street anywhere in the world and not be bothered by anyone.

(Beat. Gearing up now...)

Men of God....a lot of what we're forced to do is show business. Even the Holy Father. Without the robe he could go to a movie if he wanted to....or slip into a bar for a drink. But what is more impressive? Holding court in St. Peter's....or in a Chicago saloon? I'm from Chicago myself....and lots of guys hold court in bars there all over the city...but nobody listens to them.

But with the look comes the responsibility. A while back I got a call. One of my parishioners was dying. He needed last rights. His wife said he was hanging on....and would hang on as long as it took me to get there. So I jumped in my car....and I prayed. The rosary was hanging from the mirror....so it was easy. And I got to the hospital, and his eyes were open, and he was waiting. He smiled when I walked in. I had my collar

on...so people couldn't do enough for me. Strange what it does...see?

So I anointed him, and then he died. He would *not* die until I got there...and for a split second I felt this enormous burst of ego. God wanted him but could not have him until I said so. Dangerous thinking...so I got rid of it as quick as it came. It's when you start thinking you belong at the right hand during your time on earth that you can get into trouble. It can lead you into temptation as it were. The Lord started the tempting with Eve and the apple, and it's grown much more sophisticated since then. That I can assure you.

I choose this vocation, and I've never wavered. I've grown in many ways into it (*looks down at his belly...laughs*). It's very much like an enormous set of ill fitting clothes in the beginning. As small as you are, you always know that no matter what, you're going to get bigger. And sooner or later those clothes are going to fit. That collar starts off like a loose necklace and ends up a choker (*laughs*). What's the first thing a priest does when he gets home? He takes the collar off.

But things have to be *managed* as well. The Church can't be allowed to turn into an untied shoe. Somebody has to keep it tied together. And the man chosen to do that needs more skills than piety and fluency in different languages. The more you get into tending to a flock that large, the more you realize that you can't run the church on Hail Mary's alone. And when I first said that everybody came down hard on me. They said that it confirmed all the things they'd been accusing me of. But no, I'm in the simple business of saving souls. There's not much to it really. Rule number one is not to lose your own in the process.

I could start in so many places....but perhaps *HUMANAE VITAE* will help you to understand the dilemma we all face. All you good Catholics out there will know what *HUMANAE VITAE* is....in fact, I can see some couples squirming a bit, so you must be the married ones. (*laughs*)

But I recognize that while we are great in number, we are not quite alone. So, in the interest of fair play I'll quote...from POPE PAUL VI in 1968.....

We are obliged once more to declare that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children. Similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means.

So...taking all that into consideration...it became somewhat difficult to explain...by myself as head of the Vatican Bank...why the Vatican owned a substantial amount of stock in a Pharmaceutical company that manufactured birth control pills.

(*beat...allow this to sink in*)

I can tell you that even after logging many hours on my knees the answers from above would not come...so the confusion appeared to be heavenly as well as earthly. Such a tidy little profit we cleared though...and one could only imagine the earthly good the Holy See could do with such a windfall. And so the road to goodness is not possible to map out in advance. But it *can* be paved with gold.

In 1958 New York Cardinal Spellman said....and I quote...

Next to Jesus Christ the greatest thing that has happened to the Catholic Church is Bernardino Nogara.

Now that I'm here.... I would like them to bump Mr. Nogara to third place (*laughs*).

High praise indeed....and for a layman still.

Nogara took over the Church's finances at the urging of His Holiness Pope Pius XI. With a human flock of half a billion to attend to, I'm certain that the Holy See thought it best to leave the money changers to their own devices.

Nogara opened the Church's eyes to things she had never gazed on before....from insurance to spaghetti to real estate. The Vatican even owned stock in the company that built the Watergate Hotel...although when that became infamous we collectively prayed..."Lord, please forgive us...we know not what we do" (*laughs*).

Indeed, as I've said..."you can't run the church on Hail Mary's". Bernardino taught us all exactly what you *can* run it on. Caring for souls is free. Caring for the body, on the other hand...requires some serious cash flow.

(goes to a desk drawer and pulls out a bottle of Scotch)

Good stuff this. Wine may represent the blood of Christ but Scotch is more popular off the altar (*laughs*). If Jesus had come around later he might have turned that water into Chivas Regal (*laughs uproariously*)

(pours a glass...inspects it...and says...)

Forgive me father....I know not what *I* do (*laughs*)

(he drinks)

The Vatican would have you believe that all holiness starts from Rome and then spreads (*laughs*)...like somebody spilling a glass of wine in the middle of the table. Well, I'm here to tell you that it is possible to spill the wine in Cicero Illinois as well. The home of Al Capone might seem an odd place to get religion.....but if you think about it, what better place is there?

My father made his living cleaning windows.....making it easier for other people to visualize *their* dreams. My mother worked in a bakery....so for us the "daily bread" meant more. Jesus might be able to create bread by the truckload, but my mother had to bake it one loaf at a time.

I had 25 cents a day.....and whatever I was gonna do I had to make do on that. Eat...bus fare. Sometimes I'd stretch it so I could go to a ballgame or a movie. You know..to stretch it all I had to do was not go to school (*laughs*). Just a normal childhood. Dated a few girls.....but decided that playing with fire meant you'd get burned. (*laughs*)

Cicero was the kind of place where every action had a consequence.....but *only* if you didn't know the right people. That's how for 40 years only 2 out of nearly 1000 murders were actually solved. There was something unreal about that place....and anytime anybody from Cicero traveled outside the town's protective layer, it was like venturing into outer space. People acted different. They talked different. Words that would get you off the hook in Cicero meant little outside of it. Here I thought it was the whole world. And in truth, it *was*for those who had no business on the outside. But I had some deals to make.....I wanted to know more....maybe find out why a place like Cicero was invented in the first place. There were two ways out. Capone....or God. God seemed easier to get to know (*laughs*)

And don't take this the wrong way.....but I can say now that if there are two places that know how to keep their own secrets....they are Cicero and the Vatican. (*laughs*) Of course that's not to say that Capone would feel equally at home in either place...but only that he'd understand why everybody was always whispering (*laughs*).

I never had any problems with my studies....but I was no shining star in the classroom either. You know....there's more to life than cracking a book. You need some human contact. All I ever wanted to be was a simple parish priest. I never wanted to get involved with banking

I was ordained a priest in 1947...the year that Capone died and was given a Catholic burial. It was said that he repented, and as a young man wrestling with all the temptations that all young men wrestle with, knowing this made me feel better somehow. *My* odds improved suddenly, if you know what I mean. (*laughs*)

In Chicago I played football. I was a bit more impressive physically then that I am now I'm afraid.....but I found the game liberating. Games are one of His creations as well, and there are times when some hand to hand contact is good for the soul. And there have been times since when an argument could be won by my simply standing up from behind my desk. I confess that the smaller the adversary, the more liable I was to use this tactic, but then we all must stretch our legs on occasion.

I went to University in Rome....got a doctorate in Canon Law....which can help or hinder when it comes to banking....depending on who you're actually working for. Hindsight is 20/20 of course....and I've been cursed with perfect vision my whole life.

(beat. Takes a drink. Pauses here to take a breath)

You'll want to talk about Pope John Paul I...right?

If not for him, you wouldn't know me. Him dying has made me famous...or infamous depending on your religious persuasion *(laughs)*

Many still say that I killed him..or at the very least ordered him killed, as if I had the hotline to Marlon Brando. Poison is how I supposedly did it. Of course, poisoning a pope is not uncommon....nor apparently is it very difficult if you look through history.

I was told before I came over here that the only problem with Rome was the Italians.

I remember a group of Italian workers one time....around Christmas. Forced to get up from one of their 4 hour afternoon siestas and do some actual work. They were told to clean up St. Peter's square, so they hosed it down with water. Only they forgot that it was late December and the place froze like a hockey rink. You're dealing with more piety than brains most of the time.

A curious bunch they are. You have to understand....there are only so many top jobs here...see? It's not like you can simply create some patronage job for a buddy. It's not Chicago...and the Pope ain't Capone. His job is harder. And you gotta remember. God doesn't appoint the pope. A bunch of old fussy Cardinals with assorted axes to grind do. So you gotta play both sides of the fence if you wanna be elected. Of course, being Italian helps *(laughs)*..but we now know that non-Italians *can* get elected as long as they act like an Italian *(laughs)*

There's a limited number of bishops and cardinals...in the old days Leo X used to auction off Cardinal hats when he needed an infusion of cash.....and he never could get enough *(laughs)*. Things are a bit more complicated now. Not *much* mind you.*(laughs)*

(getting back on track) But poisoning a pope...right?

John VIII was killed by his own servants....and when they decided that the poison wasn't working fast enough, they bashed him with clubs to speed the process along.

You've heard this prayer haven't you? "God, grant me patience....but dammit hurry up."*(laughs)*

Can I tell you a few more? I promise not to go on like Homer.....*(laughs)*

Pope Alexander VI. He died of poison after having dinner with a cardinal. It was rumored that the cardinal suspected that the Pope would try to poison *him* so he switched wine glasses. Alex liked to go to parties where prostitutes danced on the papal table....and he would raise money by killing people and taking their land. Nobody ever said the Italians

were complicated. *(laughs)*.

And this was all before celibacy was on the radar....and old Alex had himself a concubine that'd make a Mormon blush *(laughs)*

There is a saying in the Vatican...."He who drinks of the water in the Vatican will die soon". You think the water in Mexico is bad. All that'll give you is a bad case of the runs. *(laughs)*. Alexander was a Borgia. You heard the saying "Tasting the cup of the Borgia"? What do you think that meant? The "cantarella"....that was the name of their special concoction. Even chemists today can't figure it out. Worked like a charm though. They could give you a dose that'd kill you instantly....or one that would kill you slow...in a few days. And when Alexander was tricked into drinking his own brew....well...his corpse grew so blackened and bloated from the poison that they couldn't get the coffin shut until a bunch of guys sat on it.....like when we over pack a suitcase for a trip. *(laughs)*. Now how am I gonna compete with *that* *(laughs)*

Leo X supposed first words as pope were..."now I can *really* enjoy myself..." But his people tried to kill him too I'm afraid....by inserting poison in the papal orifice during a hemorrhoid operation. The Holy Spirit has thankfully come a long way since then.

There's not much gray area here....I mean.....once you get inside. People are either with you, or against you....and everybody is afraid of everybody else. Poor Clement XIV was so terrified of the Jesuits that he stopped kissing the feet of the cross in the Vatican 'cause he was sure that the Jesuits put poison on them. I'm afraid of the Jesuits too....but I never went *that* far. *(laughs)*

Interesting bunch....see?

So it was all there....laid out. I was just another in a long line.

It's a village....see? But it's like a village of washerwomen. They get down in the river, wash clothes, punch 'em, dance on 'em, squeezing all the old dirt out. In normal life, people have other interests? Here....what else do they have to talk about? I had the greatest secretary back in Chicago. Want to know why? Because at 5 O'clock she'd pick up her purse and be *gone*. She never gave it a second thought when she was off the clock. But the Vatican? They're never off the clock there. What else do they have to do?

And I show up. And I'm not a grizzled little old dwarf like some of these Italians. I've got my cigar, and compared to them I look like some sort of giant. They sip their wine, and I like my shots of whiskey. Who's got time for wine?

And I'm an American, which makes me guilty by association immediately. And they start calling me the "gorilla".

Want to know where that started? Well, Paul VI came to Chicago...and these guys had no idea about security. They figured that he'd walk through crowds and they'd part like

the Red Sea. Well, Chicago wanted to *see* the man, you know?...and they started clustering around, until he got hemmed in this crowd...and nobody did anything. I mean, they were all standing there blessing themselves or something. So I just kinda dove in and started moving people. I mean.....the Lord will provide.....but *please*. You have to get off your ass every once in a while to give Him a hand.

Let me tell you something else that might explain it better. The Pope came to the US and said mass at Yankee stadium. *Yankee Stadium*. And some of our people were actually upset that the security guards had their back to the pope. They thought that it was disrespectful. (*shakes his head in bewilderment*)

That's the mentality I'm dealing with.

They'd get the seating chart of some of the planned events and start complaining 'cause they weren't sitting close enough to the Pope...that kind of thing. It was all about appearances. It was like traveling with a bunch of hairdressers. *You* see the Pope everyday. Let the local bishop sit next to him when he comes to town....for God's sake. You see what I'm saying? But they didn't like that. A friend told me once that I was the only person he knew that would say no to a cardinal (*laughs*)....which would certainly explain why I never became one.

No winning popularity contests there. A Cardinal has got a memory like an elephant. Ever hear that one? (*laughs*)

But, I've lived a comfortable life. Maybe too comfortable...but who can tell that? Judge not lest ye be judged? Remember that one? Lotta memory lapses in Rome.

I like my golf...my tennis. I like to do physical things....you sit in an office all day long and you get groggy. Physical things take the badness out of me. It's like a sort of baptism in a way. A cleansing of the spirit.

You know...it's so easy to say....."lets all live in poverty". But there are 2 poverty's really. There's poverty of the spirit....using your money only as a means...and then there's the sort of poverty where you have nothing.....destitution. That's not the sort of poverty that the Lord teaches about. He doesn't say...."don't go golfing.....you should be working in a leper colony instead"...no, he says to get your own house in order...do what you need to replenish your spiritual side. You know, it's hard to be spiritual when you're hungry and don't have shoes on your feet. You can take things too far...see?

(*beat. Aware of his tangent...wanting to get back on track*)

But...Papa Luciani. Pope Paul I

Why would anybody want to kill a pope? And Luciani especially. There was an innocence about him....almost like a child. He shuffled when he walked....like a kid rubbing his socks on the carpet to give you one of them static shocks.

Paul VI had been in the Curia for over 30 years...see? He knew his way around. He knew the way the place worked. He knew where everything was. He knew where the bodies were buried (*laughs*) And even with all that...it took him what? 6...8 months to get his bearings? And now Luciani comes out of Venice.....a small diocese. You could run it on a part time basis. That's how small it was. And now he's in charge of 1 billion souls. Overnight! He doesn't even know where his office *is*. He doesn't know what the secretary of state *does*. He can't go to the bathroom without people following him. He was a very simple man. A holy man.....but a simple one. In way over his head. He looked so young and fresh....and in a matter of weeks he'd turned into an old man.

And they start bringing him papers...."here, go through these....sign these....read this". He didn't even know where to start. In Venice he could get up and go out....go for a walk, take a nap.....talk to the people...smell the flowers. But here....he's locked in. He can't get out. The paper is piling up. And they always called him the "smiling Pope".....but I'll tell you, that was a very nervous smile.

And his health.....nobody knew it but it wasn't very good to start with, and now with all this stress. Divine Providence? Maybe. I can see how it can happen. I mean....the stress of the whole thing was overwhelming. It killed him. And every day you pick up the paper and people are dying. Did somebody kill *them*? I mean...when the Lord wants you...he takes you. There's no negotiating. In that way....our Lord is very dictatorial (*laughs*).

And so they didn't do an autopsy? Well, they *never* do an autopsy on a Pope.

In the old days...a dead pope....they used to hit him on the head with a silver hammer to see if he was dead. Well, if he wasn't dead....this guy woulda killed him...you know? In the bad old days (*laughs uproariously*). "Hey there! (*bangs his fist down on a desk... "bang"*). Are you dead?" (*laughs*)

There was all this nonsense about him getting rid of me. I went so see John Paul a few days before he died and he was very kind with me. He thanked me for all the work I'd been doing and asked me to stay on. Funny way to fire a guy.....(*laughs*) But still, there were whispers. What am I supposed to do about it? Jump off a cliff? I've got a job to do. See...I come from the States. The Italians have a different way of doing things over there. They'll smile you to death. You don't know whether they're praying for you or plotting against you. They rarely tip their hand. Me...I call a spade a spade....and it's always gotten me into trouble.

And sometimes I'll go out with friends....and people will stare across the room at me...you know... (*whispers*) "it's him...it's him"...and I'll go over and ask them if they want my autograph. (*laughs*). People are gonna believe what they wanna believe. I know what and who is in my heart.

I never asked for a thing. I never asked for the job at the Vatican Bank. I never refused a job either. That's not my place. I can say that I don't feel competent to do a job, but that's

as far as it goes. And when they offered the bank....I told them straight out..."you must be out of your minds!". I mean....my only experience with money was the Sunday collection plate. *(laughs)*....not that I wasn't good at counting *that* *(laughs)*...but this is a bit different. I went off to New York for a few days....to see how banking worked. I actually spent one day in a small local bank seeing how the entire process worked. I had no idea. I was talking to the tellers....asking them what they did. It was crazy.

But really.....how much do you need to know?

I've always had organizational talents.....and they knew it once I started planning papal trips. I mean....some of these old timers can't even dress themselves and now they gotta start thinking about airports and hotels and missing luggage. God doesn't find your luggage. I do...see? And so they figured I could do some of the same things over at the Bank. Organize things.

(peering into the audience intently)

This is turning into quite the confessional. Maybe I should pause a bit and rest. I feel like a bottle with the cork pulled out. Leave the bottle out long enough and it gets flat.

Speaking of which *(goes over to fill up his scotch, but realizes the bottle is now empty)*....

(showing the empty to the audience) Well.....whadda we got here? A dead aposle.
(pause)

If you give me a few minutes I'll find a live one and continue.

(starts to walk offstage)

Talk amongst yourselves...please. I won't be long...

Lights

End of Act I

Act II

LIGHTS – Archbishop Paul Marcinkus shuffles back onstage, proudly holding aloft a fresh bottle of Scotch. He reaches the bar area and pours himself a drink.

You're still here? Good. I hate to drink alone.

It's an interesting thing....to have my kind of faith. It's different than most I think. Faith is nothing more than self confidence. If you have doubts...then by definition you've lost faith. What I learned in Chicago was that doubts are weakness.....like cracks in the

foundation. When a married couple would come to see me...for counseling....and they started asking for some sort of divine catholic intervention to save the marriage....well, it's too late. That's not what faith is. If you've simply dumped your baggage at the Lord's feet...he's not gonna pick it up for you. He had to do that once with the cross....and it wasn't too pleasant. I mean....he saved us already....see? Why are you asking Him to do it again?

And see....that's the problem. Even in the Vatican....even Pope John Paul....they'd lay their doubts out like fine china at a dinner table. Luciani would walk around all day praying....actually *praying*....for God to take him. He didn't want to *be here* anymore....see? In Chicago....priests are praying for da Bears. In the Vatican they're praying to be dead. There's quite a gulf there....and it's no wonder that I never really fit in.

(another beat here.....change of subject)

I suppose we gotta talk about the money some. Money makes people go mad. The root of all evil. Go through history and you'll find that when you peel all the outer layers away....power, prestige, whatever....what's left is the green. But I've been thinking. You tell me what a priest like me is gonna do with all this money I supposedly stole? I should be jet skiing in the Bahamas right about now instead of getting up at 6 in the morning to say mass to 5 people. But it's *how* I stole all this money that you'll want to hear about...yes? Can there be anything more dull to talk about than banking? I'll try to liven things up a bit. This won't take long though....not like one of my sermons (*laughs*)

(takes a drink...) ...always helps me get through this part (*laughs*)

The Vatican Bank is a service organization for the Church. But it also handles the finances of the 8000 Vatican employees and their families. Now when they retire they expect a pension...see? They may be devout Catholic folks....but they're not gonna let me pay 'em in rosary beads...you know what I mean? They want their money. You see what I'm getting at? And the Church....it's made of bricks right? Well, I ain't no bricklayer. So, we gotta go out and hire one. And then he's got employees too...and they all expect a pension. If one of 'em bangs their head on a church pew....we gotta pay the bill for that. The Holy Spirit provides lots of things...but he doesn't deal with Health Insurance. And at the end of the year....whatever money we have coming in gets funneled back into the church. This is not an ordinary bank. I told my employees that all the time. It's not the First National of Des Moines. There if they have a good year, the president gets a Cadillac. That's not the way things work here.

So what we do is take the money in the bank...and invest it....safe investments mostly. But sometimes....we make mistakes. Sometimes you end of trusting folks you should not have trusted. That can happen anywhere....but in Italy? Seems like everybody that comes walking through the door wearing a nice suit has got Mafia ties if you dig deep enough. And I can't ask for a dossier on everyone that comes into my office. In Italy? Are you kidding?

So we get into business with this bank from Milan. This guy has a great reputation in the banking community. For years you had to show a baptismal certificate to even open an account there...so you know you're dealing with the faithful.

Everybody at the Vatican was high on him. What am I supposed to do? He *looked* OK to me. He gave me his word....and if you give me that I'll take it from you. And then this guy gets thrown in jail....and I start screaming...you know..."what the hell is going on here?". And they say to me...."don't worry. If you don't get caught, that just means you're not worth anything."

I mean...it's a different *world* over there. And so we help him some...take care of his things until he can get out. That sort of thing. And then he gets out and it's business as usual. In Italy going to jail is like going to the corner to get cigarettes.

And I have to tell you....the money was coming in. You see that, and maybe you turn your head some. I don't know. I'd like to be able to sit here and tell you that I didn't get excited looking at the numbers going up. It's like a game after a while. You forget you're dealing with real dollars. It's like a whirlpool and it's easy to get swept up in it. But it's like we're not supposed to be good at this sort of thing...see? We're supposed to be pious...pure....impoverished somehow. And yet....when John Paul II wants 50 million dollars sent in secret to Solidarity in Poland....well....where does he expect he's getting it from? I don't have it in my desk. So there's some hypocrisy there.

Cue the lightning strike here....right? Don't worry, you're safe with me. (*laughs*)

And finally...the bubble burst....like all bubbles eventually do. And this bank we're dealing with is now 1.3 billion in the hole. That's "billion" with a "B". And everybody follows the paper trail...and sees the Vatican Bank name all over the place. I'm telling you....everybody ran for cover. And here I am left holding the public relations bag. All we did was try to help the guy....and later they find him hanging underneath a bridge in London with his pockets stuffed with bricks. And then some paid off coroner says..."well, it looks like a suicide". A suicide?! It was like gas on the flames. When I kill myself, I'm gonna make sure I stuff my pockets full of bricks first (*laughs*). I don't like to take the name of the Lord in vain...but Jesus Christ! (*laughs*)

I mean...what next? The mob got him. Everybody knew that. But in Italy nobody gave a damn about the mob anymore. It's like writing about the Democrats around here. But now they had this Vatican angle. And who was running the Vatican Bank? And so now I become the mob priest...laundering mob money. They say I got Swiss bank accounts....piles of cash buried everywhere. All kinds of things. And I look the part. Dark eyes. Big. Nice guinea last name (*laughs*).

And so as a "goodwill gesture" the church decides to pay 250 million in compensation for the whole thing. And I said...."no way....we're not guilty of anything...so we don't pay." And they said...."well, we'll get sued"....and I said..."well, of course you will, this

is a *business*...but if you haven't done anything wrong, they won't win any lawsuits"...see?

And so they're telling everybody who'll listen that they don't have any money..which isn't true of course. They own about half a billion dollars in real estate alone...not to mention that art collection that they keep buried for a rainy day...but anyway...now they're offering to pay a quarter of a billion dollars that they don't have to pay?

So they say it's for *moral consideration*, which is one of those fancy names that doesn't mean anything. Isn't that admitting guilt? And now the stigma is there. We paid up...so we're guilty. Here we are trying to get nickels and dimes from the faithful every Sunday, and suddenly, in one swoop...a huge pile of it is gone. All the work I'd done to build this thing up. What happens years from now...when people come looking for their pensions? What do you tell them? You can't have it due to *moral considerations*?

And what about me? I'm the face of all this now..lining my own pockets of course. And the Italians all figure that now is the perfect time to get rid of me....the press is murderous. And then Luciani becomes Pope....and of course I had to kill him because he was gonna do me in. He was gonna take away my jet skis (*laughs*)

(beat here. Maybe take a sip of scotch...or even sit down for a bit)

Let me tell you. In a lotta ways.....this is a good life. The essentials are taken care of...food, clothing...shelter. And nice shelter too (*pointing to the window*). The 15th hole is right out there (*laughs*) If there was ever a sport that tests your faith...it's golf. You think you're infallible? Try to hit a 1 iron. Lee Trevino said that in a lightning storm the safest thing to do is stick a 1 iron in the air...because "even God can't hit a 1 iron" (*laughs*)

There's a certain power to the priesthood. I can put on street clothes...and go downtown.....and nobody pays any attention. Put on my black suit though....with the nice white collar....and it's "Hello father....how are you father...." People that are rude to everyone else aren't rude to you. And who wouldn't like that? So the collar is almost like protection from the real world. As long as you're wearing it.....you don't get to see everything. And who wants to see *everything*? Not me...that's for sure.

But we feel like...in certain ways....we have to *earn* it. We have to be holier. That's what celibacy is all about. We have to keep that arms length away. And if you can do that...keep the flock away....they'll treat you different. They won't hold you to the same standards....because you're different than them. Holier. Better.

You know me a bit by now. Do you think I'm holier than you? (*laughs*)

I choose this life, and I do the best I can with what God gave me. But I wasn't born with this halo...(*laughs*)

We're human, and one thing humans have in common is the innate ability to act like asses. And sometimes it's easier to act like an ass when you're surrounded by other people acting like asses. It becomes contagious...the mob mentality. And by and large, I've discovered that people act like asses when they are attempting to hide something.

From the top to the bottom...it's always...."what will people say...what will people say". Let me tell you what they'll say. They'll call you a pack of hypocrites when the story gets out. And if history has taught us anything, it's that the story *always* gets out. It's like wearing a rubber band around your wrist....it might last a week...it might last a year...but it's gonna break...see?

And so in trying so hard to *appear* holier than hell.....we end up *acting* anything but. See?

So how does this all fit in?

Well....the pope dies sometime in the middle of the night. And nobody knows it but it's his custom for a nun to drop off coffee for him every morning. So it's a nun who finds him dead....in bed.

Well...can't you just see where I'm going with this? For a group that swears off sex, sometimes it seems like we don't think about anything else. A nun in the papal bedroom? These old timers are scandalized....what will the faithful say? So they immediately put their small heads together and change the story.....saying it was one of the male secretaries who found him. Only the Pope has got 2 make secretaries....and pretty soon *both* of them are claiming to have found him. You should have seen these two guys! They'd sit on either side of the pope eyeballing each other.....like 2 little girls sitting next to the captain of the football team. People started calling them the Pope's "widows" (*laughs*)

And Luciani is standing up talking to the faithful about Pinocchio and how there's more "mother" than "father" in the Lord. And everybody is thinking....."these guys ain't gonna last long" (*laughs*). I'm telling you....you need thick skin here. One guy told me that he thought the Holy Spirit did a good job getting rid of Luciani before he could do some real damage.

Anyway...where was I? Ah yes.....the bedroom.....well, they neglect to tell the little old nun that what they're up to...and she's going around telling everybody the *actual* truth...that *she* found the body. And the press is writing that half the Vatican is claiming that they found the dead pope. Can't you just see Oliver Stone salivating? And that caused the whole thing? See?

And even something little...inconsequential. They say he died in bed, reading something. God knows what it was now.....they've said that he was clutching a list of people he was gonna replace...he was gonna make all these sweeping changes....clean up the church!....and of course my name was on the list. Nonsense. He didn't even know where

the Vatican Bank *was*. One time he was walking around the gardens on the roof and the notes to his sermon got blown out of his hand into the courtyard...and instead of getting off his ass to get them he goes back to his room and curls up on the bed and starts to cry. This guy is gonna change the church? I could have loaded the bank vault into my car and he wouldn't have noticed.

But you know what the Italian boys did? They figure... "well, he was the Pope...so he's gotta be reading something popely (*laughs*)....so tell everyone he was reading *Imitation of Christ*." The guy was probably reading the funny papers...you know? But soon it goes out on the wire...and somebody says...."no, he wasn't reading a book, he was writing a sermon"...and then nobody could produce this *Imitation of Christ* book that they said he was reading...turns out there wasn't a copy in the entire Vatican anywhere....and again, the whispers started...you know...."they're lying about who found him...and now they're even lying about what he was reading." I mean...give these guys a rope and all they'll know how to do with it is tie a noose.

And so now with all this whispering going on somebody mentions that they see me hanging around the Vatican awfully early in the morning. You know....like I'm lurking around the courtyard with blood on my hands or something. Well, I hate to break the news....but I *worked* at the Vatican...remember?...which to me at least is a pretty good reason for being there. I didn't live there....so I had a 20 minute drive every morning, and I liked to get into the office early. Beat the traffic. Read the paper.

And I get out of my car and a member of the Swiss guard comes over...and he was talking real fast and I thought he said "I had a dream that the Pope was dead"...and I told him that he shouldn't say things like that....and then he said..."no, look at the flag at half mast"...and right then I knew.

(Beat. Silent for a time. Affected by this some...)

You know....I don't have many friends. In this business....they're hard to come by. Remember what Lincoln said...."there's too many pigs for the tits"...(*laughs*). You gotta keep your own counsel. You never know who might be listening in. There's more hidden doors in that place than a Cicero speakeasy (*laughs*).

Let me tell you something. The car I drove in Rome was 13 years old. This thing looked like one of Mussolini's tanks...and probably got the same gas mileage. You know...what do I care? It's a stupid car.

But then one day the Vatican car pool gets a new Peugeot....and they ask me to try it out. So I drive it around the Vatican for a few days....trying it out. And everywhere I go people are saying..."hey, look who's got a new car"...you know, snickering. And then the next day I'm driving my tank again....and they look positively crestfallen when they find out that they were wrong....that I didn't get a new car at all. See?

(suddenly weary) You know...maybe I haven't been nearly ambitious enough. Maybe

that's my problem. If I had, maybe I wouldn't be in the mess I'm in now.

And the new Pope....John Paul II. You should have seen the Italians when he was voted in. They all looked like somebody peed in their wine! Oh, they hated him. A Foreigner! Are you kidding me? Their guy...the number one Italian contender...I can't even remember his name now....the great white hope....he'd been slimming down....cutting down on the linguini so he'd look good in the pope cassock....and he doesn't get in. And then he goes and dies from disappointment. *(laughs)*

But it turns out that they were pretty happy with JP II. He hated communists and condoms....just like the old Italians.....so what's not to like...see? *(laughs)*

Think about it? Why do you think they picked me? What do I *represent*? That's the important question here....not so much what or who I am.

For the Vatican....I'm the guy from Chicago that can talk the people's language. I mean....it took 'em a thousand years to stop speaking Latin for Christ sake...so you gotta cut 'em *some* slack. *(laughs)*

I had the whole office cracking up one day when Mother Teresa was waiting in the lobby to see me and I said out loud..."great....I bet this is gonna cost me a million bucks". *(laughs)* See? You gotten loosen things up sometimes.

I'm the guy that can walk outside the place and deal with people on their own terms. I can belt a golf ball a mile....grab a beer and a dog and teach you some curse words. Call me the ugly American....call me whatever you want....nobody wants to get *their* hands dirty. The dirty work needs to get done though...the world revolves around it....so they ask me to do it. And then they hate me for it....but when I come bearing gifts...you bet your ass they'll take 'em. They may not take 'em in front of the congregation...but they'll meet me at the back door...see?

And from the inside....I represent the walls closing in. Rome is burning...you know? You can walk around with your rosary inside these walls all you want....but you ain't gonna stop the flames. So they'll send me out....you know....saying "*find out what it is they want*". And I'll report back and tell 'em...and they'll say..."*oh...well, we can't give them that.*" *(laughs)*

We're like animals in the zoo at the Vatican....and when you looked at us from the outside....well...you could stare and watch us devour one another. They kept building more and more on the outside....higher and higher...and pretty soon our walls and guards and gates couldn't keep things out anymore.

We became like the last holdout. Back in Chicago when I was a pastor they wanted to build a big department store in this rundown neighborhood....but there were some old homes in the way. So they bought out everybody except for this one little 75 year old Italian guy. He refused to move. So they had to build the thing around him. He sat there

day after day surrounded by dirt and rocks and parking lots. They kept waiting for the guy to die...but he wouldn't. He lived to spite 'em. Stubborn bastard he was. Member of my parish. Only a Catholic would do that (*laughs*).

I've tried to reconcile the old with the new...I've served 3 popes...and done what I was told. I blessed myself with one hand and counted their money with the other. Hey, I call a spade a spade. Spreading God's word helps some....don't get me wrong, but spreading his money will make *true* believers out of 'em. You can't eat prayers. And there's something in there that makes people nervous....and right in the middle....there's me.

(Beat. Takes a drink)

And some want to put a face on that gray area. So they wanted to arrest me. They couldn't 'cause I had Vatican diplomatic immunity....but they fought that every day....but just like that old Italian in Chicago....I outlasted 'em. Right before the warrant was issued, I told the press "I may be a lousy banker...but at least I'm not in jail." I should have kept quiet.*(laughs)*

And I'm sitting here now...wondering what all the fuss is about. I mean....I'm just a simple parish priest. I sleep good. I always sleep good.

But now.....*(looks around)*....I can't sleep. Ironic isn't it? *(laughs)*

You want to arrest me? You gonna put me on trial for making money for my church? For poisoning a guy who walked around all day begging *God* to kill him? The same ones who built me up....now they want to tear me down? Jesus might have chased the money changers from the temple....but he might never have made it past the Swiss guard to get into the Vatican.

All I ever wanted to do was be a priest. But that's not possible anymore. You have to be more than that. I guess that's progress.....but you know....if it is?...maybe them old timers ain't so bad after all. Don't tell 'em I said that though. *(laughs)*

Catholics don't have much of a memory....so by the time I got here I was just an old priest sitting in the sun. Stayed to myself mostly...filling in here or there when they needed me. There's other old timers out here...some Vatican survivors.....and we'll get together and talk some. And we were talking one day and somebody asked..."what's the worst thing anybody ever said about you?"

And I remember not wanting to answer...but I finally did. A few days after Luciani died, somebody came up to me and said that I had no soul. If he had called me an asshole...I would have punched him out....but he didn't. He said I had no soul. Then he turned and walked away.

(quiet for a long time.....even slightly emotional)

How do you answer that? I've spent all these years looking to it...searching it...and now you tell me that it's not even there? Is that what blind faith does to you?

(quiet again)

I've lived a life of prayer. But it seems to me now.....I don't know...maybe I should have paid more attention to the things I prayed *for*.

But it's getting late....and I still haven't had my confession. So if you'll excuse me...

(kneels down in the "confessional")

You're probably wondering if I'm going to tell Him the same things I've told you? To tell you the truth, I'm wondering the same thing myself. But I never know what I'm gonna say until I get here....

(referring to the kneeler)

Been wearing this thing out. No rest for the departed...right?

You think the work is over when you go.....but it goes on. I've had to work for everything I've gotten.

I'll work for this too.

(kneeling...blesses himself)

Lights...slow fade