

Raising Spirits.

# Raising Spirits.

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A man and his struggle with his own spiritual relationship and a relationship with spirits.

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## Meeting the Father.

He stood tall and proud at the head of the room. His face wore a solemn expression, but his posture reflected a man with will power and righteousness. This was a man whose teachings were respected throughout the world, and in this room, at this time, all eyes were on him. They were hoping when the time comes, he will remember those who stared hard enough and lead them to the salvation he offered. All eyes except the two that belong to a man whose face was listless and agitated. He was facing away from the statue of Jesus that hung on the wall behind him so he could address his congregation, and *preach* the word of the lord. I hesitate to use the word preach, because you must have belief and emphasis to preach. No, this man was no better than a pair of speakers playing a bible on a cassette tape (I can't compare him to a reading of the bible on a cd because the sound would be just far too clear.)

Peter Leery, I should call him Father Leery out of respect, but if he didn't believe in the title himself I see no reason to believe in it either. Peter Leery stood with his back turned to the tall statue of Jesus and addressed his congregation with the final prayer of this particular Sunday mass, "please stand and let us pray," he spoke out projecting his voice to the near empty church, and as he was just about to begin "Our Father" he noticed for the first time that morning, that the only family in his church was a family he did not recognize. Last Sunday there had been no one in attendance, so like the Sunday before he had offered only himself communion, but with his head down and guilt in his heart. When he noticed them he was just happy that someone still had faith, but before he started his "Our Father" prayer he heard the family starting the prayer without him. It wasn't the "Our Father" prayer he had known, and said a million times throughout his life, it was different and insulting.

The Castillo's were a young family, with two children. A young boy who was wearing an adorable child's suit with a blue jacket and khaki pants sat quietly. It almost made him look like an adult if it hadn't been for his height and the promising gleam in his eyes. Beside him sat a beautiful toddler girl who wore her new blue church dress with shiny black shoes. She sat there quiet and attentive wanting to impress her mother, proving how good she could be during today's mass. The proud parents of these two children sat with patience in their Sunday best, waiting for their son to give them a nudge and tell them when they should stand, sit, or kneel. The Castillo parents didn't know English very well, but with help from their children they made it through the entire sermon not missing a beat. The Castillo's normally attend the Spanish-speaking mass in the new catholic church a couple miles from their house, but due to some car trouble this particular Sunday they missed it. They had not missed mass for as long as they could remember so they walked a couple blocks to this church and sat respectfully. They barely understood a word the shabby old priest had said, but when the son pulled on the sleeve of his father's shirt and whispered to him that it was time to start the "Our Father" prayer, they stood in unison and began.

"Padre nuestro que estÃs en los cielos, santificado sea tu nombre,  
venga tu reyno,  
hagase tu voluntad,  
asÃ en la tierra como en el cielo.  
Danos hoy nuestro pan cotidiano,  
Y perdÃnanos nuestras deudas,  
asÃ como nosotros perdonamos Ã nuestros deudores.  
Y no nos metas en tentaciÃn,  
  
mas libranos de mal."

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Father Leery - I am overwhelmed to call him Father out of respect, so I will continue to do so - started to begin his prayer and could only stand shocked at what he was hearing. He forced himself to feel offended, but still he was glad just to have someone sitting in his pews. He ran his tongue around his gums and teeth tasting the hot, sweet taste of communion wine and waited for the Spanish-speaking family to finish their prayers. Interrupting would be disrespectful, so when he heard what must have been an "amen" he quickly added in an "amen" of his own. Out of reflex he said, "may the Lord be with you," but no reply came. He remembered the days when this church full of people would reply in unison, "and also with you," but he just cracked the silence of the church by saying "may you go in peace."

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Quickly the man in priests clothes slammed the door of his office and sank in the chair behind his desk. He sat down with so much discontent. It moved the chair back several inches and he almost fell right out of it. He pulled a key hanging around his neck and opened the bottom drawer to fish out his bottle of four dollar Irish whiskey, but to no surprise his bottle was empty. His bottles were empty most of the time, and empty bottles only reminded him of how comforting it felt when he had full bottles. He thought of a particular feeling, cracking an unopened seal of a full bottle and felt ashamed of the pleasure that he received from this. This time he was feeling neither shame nor happiness, just worries. He told the two sisters that helped around the church during the weekdays that he would start drinking less after they caught him guzzling down the communion wine in his office. Itâs the reason he had left the empty bottle in his desk drawer. The sisters take out the garbage every Monday and he knew they would see the empty bottle if he left it in the trash. "Oh those girls" he said out loud, but finished the thought in his mind, *fuck those arrogant women. I have given up romance, money, and a real life, for what? So my flock could desert me to attend a new super church with speakers and microphones and a fucking orchestra they call a church band! I WILL drink, and I will drink until every last memory of this church and this religion has been wiped from my mind.*

He regretted these thoughts of his as soon as he had raised himself out of the chair and walked over to the label-less bottle he had just blessed this morning. He knew he shouldnât drink the blood of Christ to get drunk, especially if your drinking to forget Christ all together, but he drank, and drinking turned to guzzling, and the guzzling turned to chugging like some frat boy at a college party. He felt no shame as the blood of Christ dripped from the corners of his mouth like he was some vampire at a Thanksgiving feast. He thought, *how could this be the blood of Christ, our holy savior? A priest, a holy and righteous man upholding the beliefs of the Catholic church must bless the wine before it becomes a sacrament.* He knew he wasnât holy or righteous, and he didnât even understand the beliefs of the Catholic church anymore. So he knew what he was drinking was just wine. Cheap red wine. He had only blessed vainly to satisfy his routine.

*I, who knew nothing but the teachings of the bible and used that as a guide in which to feel my emotions and to shield myself behind, learned quickly how I should live my life as a holy man. When all the holiness was removed, I was left with a man pretending. I struggle to discover what I have inside myself, other than faith, and I hate me as a human being, and I hate myself as a priest. As a disciple of God people viewed me as though I held a key, and they lined up to beg for me to turn this key to revelation and guide them into salvation, but when your key doesnât fit into heavens gates anymore you are left to understand yourself on this Earth, in this reality, not the next. I had an understanding of the scriptures and challenged myself to understand Jesus as my savior, but there was something else present within. Free will. Mans will. I let it dominate me and I slipped out of Gods hands and into this purgatory.*

Father Leery pondered pensively on these thoughts as the wine warmed his cold flesh and his stomach turned sour, and although his office was as chilly as a penguinâs tit - his uncle would say that as a joke every once in a while for cheap laughs, "ha did you hear the father say tit?" he hated it, but when he became Father of his uncles church he noticed the same joke slipping out of his mouth, but hated it - he sank into his chair, bathing in the heat that flowed through his veins. He couldnât help but think about the moment when his flock

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deserted him.

A knock came loud and confident behind his office door disrupting his drunken thoughts. It was a knock unlike any he had heard in this church, a knock of business like determination that frightened the priest. He could have stood up to answer the door and greeted whoever was behind it with a priest like hospitality, but he didn't. "Come in," he yelled, with a crack in his voice that sounded anything but hospitable.

The door swung open and two men wearing suits with stupid ties around their necks came in with far too much confidence and far too wide of grins. "Hello Father, we thought we would catch you during business hours," said the taller, skinnier of the two, and his short, fat companion laughed as though this was supposed to be a joke. They both extended their hands to the priest as though he was supposed to shake both of them at the same time. After an uncomfortable amount of time, and long after both of their fake grins had fallen from their faces, the father took the skinnier mans hand and gave it his most limp, and I don't give a fuck handshake he could muster. Then, as though he was being forced to, he grabbed the fat mans hand so hard he could feel the finger bones rub against each other under his grip. He saw the man attached to the pathetic limb grimace as he barely spat out, "nice to meet you," although clearly it wasn't nice meeting him at all.

"What do you want?" The father was quick to ask before the two tried to powder up some bullshit about the weather, or some other form of small talk he was uncomfortable with.

The two men glanced at each other subtly, hoping the other one noticed the man's dark red lips and the almost empty bottle of label-less wine that stayed glued to the priests left hand.

"We are here to talk about our great city Father," said the taller one with practiced vagueness.

"Let me ask Father, do you like football?" followed up the fat one.

"Because our town is on the top of the list to be the newest addition to the National Football League."

Peter didn't know what irritated him most, whether they continued to call him Father, or the fact they called this city great, or how that skinny bastard didn't even let him answer the question that he asked him. Of course he liked football, but he had no intention of expressing that to either of these two.

The two men exchanged glances seeing the pensive look on the fathers face, and the shorter man continued noticing there was no hope for a response, "we are only steps away from securing this blessing, and all we have to do is secure the land for the new stadium."

"So, you want me to give up my church?" The priest said with so much assertiveness that neither man could grease their way around the question. It was only obvious what the two had been up to. The priest wasted no time with pleasantries. He had caught wind of families moving, also small markets, and delis in the area being bought up, so as soon as these two walked in the door he knew what the game was. He just felt relieved that he was drunk and surly, so none of his Godly weakness would succumb him in this negotiation. "What do you have to offer? No bullshit, no games, just give me a number."

Surprised by the reaction the taller man said, "we will pay 20% above market value for the property, and \$50,000 for you as a good gesture from the city."

"From what I have been told this is more than generous for an empty church," the fat man chimed in with knowing arrogance.

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A raised eyebrow was the only response the priest gave these two, as their shiftiness presented itself more every moment he had to listen to their bullshit. He thought about the Wal-Mart and other shopping areas that were situated a mile or so north of his church on a busy street, and realized he had some bargaining room, even though the two of them tried to disguise their need to acquire this land as soon as possible. It was obvious that a successful career for these two depended on the outcome of this negotiation, and even though the recent history of this church was murky at best, he could take time to make a decision and not settle for their opening offer. "This is still a church, regardless of the number of people who attend," the priest responded after a few moments in silence, with a tone of despair he was trying to avoid.

"We are prepared to write you a check. Now, father. With this money you could donate it to charity and help a lot of needy people, you would be a local saint." The skinny man mentioned trying to back him into a corner.

Father Leery finished off the rest of the bottle glued to his hand, and with the wine still flowing down his throat he muddled, "let me think about it."

A business card was thrown on his desk by one of the two men, but Peter was too busy staring at himself in the reflection of the empty bottle to notice which one.

"Get a hold of us when you are done thinking it over," said the tall man.

Peter looked over at the card and read Jacob Wornsick, it was complete with an email, and phone number, two of them actually, one for his cell-phone and office. It dawned on him that he didn't even have an email, or a cell-phone. It made him feel helpless in a way God could never protect.

As soon as the doors shut behind the two, he could hear murmurs, but murmurs were all the discussion anyone granted him recently.

"That was weird, I didn't think the offer would go without a Hell Yes, even for a priest. Honestly this place is a dump," Jacob mentioned as they stood right outside of Father Leery's door.

"Oh, you don't know do you?" asked his partner.

"Know what? Jesus, it's just like you to save the curve ball for last."

"He was one of those child molester priests, don't ya know. All over the news about five or six years back."

The two started their walk down the aisle of God's church echoing their conversation throughout the entire building.

"Jesus Christ, really? I guess now that you mention it he seems the type."

Father Leery heard every word they had said, it didn't surprise him much, but it shocked him that anyone would take the Lord's name in vain as many times as they had in the last couple seconds, and in a church nonetheless.

He had been thinking about the circumstances in which his congregation became crickets in the parking lot long before those two arrived, but if anything sparked his memory into a gas fire it had been the two which had just blessed his office with their presence.

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I was 32 when I first started as head priest in my uncle's church. The bell rang smoothly, and the coffee and cookies flowed freely between the congregation after Sunday mass. After church one summer afternoon I had been called back in my office to address some book keeping errors, and as I entered my lonely office I let myself sink in my chair to give the uncanny and suspicious ledgers a look see. I pulled the bottle of expensive Irish whiskey out of the bottom drawer, which was given to me by my Father a couple weeks before, just after my uncle's death. My uncle and my dad built this church with their bare hands and I wanted nothing but to stand at the same altar which my uncle had stood before me, and inspire the same confidence in the Lord that he had. This opportunity was soon bestowed upon me through his death.

The desk drawer was only opened by a key that I possessed, it had been my uncle's before, and he had also kept his own bottle of expensive whiskey in this drawer. As I remember, I actually took my first drink from a bottle that called this drawer home. It felt good to be in control of my own church, even though it was my father and uncle who had built it, I was there when it was erected, and I can't help feel like it was built just for me. I leaned back comfortably in my chair, the same chair actually that previously belonged to my uncle. I remember he would recline in it after mass, bull-shitting with my dad about religion and politics, occasionally asking my opinion on things that were way beyond my mental grasp, and I answered as best as I could with a confident tone in my voice, hoping to mask my ignorance. But now here I sat, opening the same drawer, with the same key, and pulling out the same brand of whiskey those two would drink. I poured myself a glass, but it was empty of Ice, or soda, just the warm whisky that settles so perfectly with a light brown color that it's hard to see the harm in drinking one too many glasses. I forgot about the books as quickly as the sips of whisky heated my throat, and tickled the hairs on my arms. Honestly, I hadn't a care in the world for ledger books, and accounting errors, I had my own church. I basked in the tightness of my hand, all the hand shakes and blessings I had given brought on a sore feeling in my right hand, but as I have learned alcohol cures all, even if it's momentary.

Moments after my excitement of having an entire congregation hold onto my every word the emotion faded into nervousness, and then from too many drinks it faded into drunkenness, but God did I have to piss. Not an unlikely outcome of drinking too much, I have to admit. My office connected to the back bathroom and as I opened the door I found the same 14-year-old altar boy who had rung the bells before I had eaten what I admitted to everyone in the room was Jesus's body, completely naked. He was barely slipping his boxers over his ankles when I pushed my way through the unlocked door, but as quickly as I caught sight of familiar wide eyes and a contorted blob of pale skin I turned around quickly moving off and slamming the door by the doorknob that was still in my hand. There were two doors, one leading to the hallway and one to my office. They both had locks on them, but in his defense it was hard to remember to lock both of them, but in my defense it was his responsibility to lock both of them. Sadly in court this was my only defense. His parents portrayed me as a peeping tom, and a pervert. Through good, and expensive lawyers they were able to dry up every last dollar my uncle had earned with his motivational sermons and inspiring masses without me ever being convicted of a thing. The newspapers didn't care. It was all the rage at the time to present the public of pedophile priests. I pleaded for a retraction from the local papers, and they delivered with a small box article on page five between the local dog show cancellation and the upcoming holiday bazaar

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As soon as I was thinking I had a church built just for me, a new Catholic church, which would put to shame the last moments of Peter and Christ's disciples hiding in an attic to avoid persecution after Jesus's death, was constructed, and I couldn't help but believe it was to kill me. After word of mouth made it's way through the community it was rare anyone stepped through my doors to bless themselves with my holy water anymore. Spiders hanging from cob webs, and crickets in the parking lot were the only thing I was preaching to after that.

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Sometimes he thought he told himself that story over and over to convince himself he wasn't the pervert everyone thought he was, but as everyone around him voiced their opinions publicly and privately he began to believe the lies himself. In all honesty he was a good man who had given up more than most, especially the local heroes the newspapers reported about, but his sacrifices went unnoticed and what remained was an accumulation of collected opinions.

The story he was telling himself came to an abrupt end when an idea popped into his head. He rushed out the door of his office hoping to catch the two men before they left the church and yelled as soon as he saw their backs exiting, "hey wait!"

The two men both turned their heads inward to catch each others eyes, and then looked up at the man walking out of the office door, who found a place to stand directly under the statue of Jesus.

"Im ready to make a deal," Father Leery boomed out in his most merciless God impression, "but I want a couple things."

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