

# VICTORY IN TRUTH

The pews whispered to one another in softly echoing creaks and groans under the shifting weight of the faithful. Father Baird was delivering the homily in front of a monstrance that sat empty and awaiting the tiny, wafer-thin body of the Lord.

“We are all sinful from birth, and incapable of redeeming ourselves on our own. We must die to our self and turn to God to be redeemed.” The words reverberated among the arches of the high ceiling as the pious listened and blinked, children fidgeted and poked at tablets next to their parents, and one head among the congregation twitched and jerked.

“So you see, the only hope we have—the only thing we can cling to—is the pure, sweet blood of Jesus.”

“LIAR!” The body under the twitching head leapt to its feet as the accusation burst from its lips like a spatter of buckshot. “This man is a liar! Don’t listen to him! He is accursed!”

The pews spoke up now with more fully voiced grunts and grumbles as the saved sitting far from the interjector turned toward the commotion, and the justified near it shifted away. Excitement and nervousness permeated the sanctuary as the spiritual warfare, that was so often discussed safely from afar and handled with white gloves, suddenly seemed to burst onto the scene like a round of mortar fire.

Father Baird smiled unperturbed. “It seems we have a visitor today,” he intoned smoothly over the murmurs of rustling bodies. “Do you have an issue with the content of today’s message?”

“Get fucked and die,” replied the visitor with acrid satisfaction.

“I think I’ll refrain from both for the time being, if you don’t mind,” the Father responded. “But as I was saying: the blood of Christ-”

“Lies and more lies!” wailed the visitor. “All he can do is lie! Every single word that passes his lips is a filthy lie!”

“Is that so?” countered Father Baird. “I am incapable of telling the truth. That’s what you’re saying?”

“You are so warped and deluded, you have no idea what truth is,” rejoined the visitor.

“I see. Well, what if I said that *Wall-E* is Pixar’s best movie?”

The visitor hesitated slightly, suddenly unsure. “That’s subjective!” he screeched.

“Perhaps,” granted Father Baird amusedly. “But what if I said that self-proclaimed “gourmet” jellybeans aren’t as good as regular jellybeans because the flavors, while interesting and individually tasty, are too disparate, and therefore unable to be enjoyed by the handful—as they should be—like regular jellybeans?”

The visitor’s eyes narrowed as a deep growl rumbled in its throat.

Father Baird leaned in. “And would it be a lie if I were to say that Burger King’s current promotion of a Whopper meal with any drink—including milkshakes—for \$2.99, even if up-sized, is a fantastic value? Would that be a lie as well?”

The visitor hissed, grabbing a hymnal from the seatback in front of him and hurling it at the priest, missing him by a wide margin.

“And would it be a lie,” continued Father Baird, his voice rising to a serious and commanding volume, “if—as you are likely aware, or your ever-vigilant-yet-detested master is surely aware—I were to say that the service at Karpet King is excellent?” The visitor flinched at this, but Father Baird continued, stepping down from the ambo and approaching the pew in which the increasingly agitated visitor sat fidgeting. “The flagstone flooring they installed in the parsonage is gorgeous, and would have been a deal at twice the price. And the service was both professional and fast—the installation hardly impacted my day-to-day routine at all, as they completely re-floored both my living room and kitchen.”

The visitor clapped their hands over their ears desperately. “No! Shut your filthy whore mouth!” they shrieked.

But Father Baird was standing over them now, leaning in close to their face. “The flooring technicians were courteous and professional, cleaning up any and all messes they made during the job,” Father Baird said, the figure of the visitor now writhing in torment on the floor under the pew, nearly frothing at the mouth in rage. “And the sales associates were proactively helpful and informative without being the least bit pushy.”

“Nooooooooo!” the visitor shrieked, arching their back in agony as the pews around them emptied out completely.

Father Baird shoved his hand onto the sweating, veiny forehead of the visitor and whispered directly into their ear, “Based on my experience, I would absolutely and unhesitatingly recommend Karpet King to my friends and family.”

A chilling howl electrified the air of the church as Father Baird grinned down at the contorted form of the visitor thrashing now on the floor, before it came to an abrupt and rigid stillness, eyes glazed and staring. “You see, children, the truth is the greatest weapon we have against the enemy.”

A bitter vapor arose from the withering figure of the vanquished foe of the church, as the Father returned to the nave to finish the rites. By the dismissal, all that was left of the body was a mass of scorched, expired Arby’s coupons, which blew out the opened door and scattered upon the warm breeze of a fine, Sunday morning.



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