

Liturgy

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. STUDY -- NIGHT

A desk is cluttered with books and papers. As we slowly pan over the desk, we see:

A PRINTED-OUT NEWS ARTICLE

"Kingsfield Diocese Panel Vindicates Local Priest Amid Molestation Allegations"

The subheadline reads: "Patrick O'Leary had been accused of molesting more than a dozen boys during his pastoral tenure at Lord's Way Church."

Under the headline and subheadline, there is a picture of Patrick O'Leary. He's in his mid-60s and sports a gray beard.

A YEARBOOK PICTURE

Two male friends sit on a park bench.

The caption underneath the picture reads: "Poetry Club members Will Porter (2001) and Stephen Meyer (2001) find inspiration during a spring day in Kingsfield Park."

A PAMPHLET

It advertises a memorial service and vigil. "Remembering Stephen Meyer. We Lost a Gentle Soul Too Soon, But God Gained an Early Angel."

SEVERAL BOOKS

"Beautiful Justice" by John Porter

"Eye for an Eye" by John Porter

"Innocence Reclaimed" by John Porter

A CEREMONIAL DAGGER

On the hilt of the dagger is the inscription, "To John Porter. In gratitude for your continued literary excellence and for inspiring the next generation of future writers."

JOHN PORTER, mid-40s, stands in front of a full-length window. Headlights shine through the window, illuminating the piece loose leaf in John's hand.

The light from the headlights reveals the poem written on the paper. "One-Year Anniversary" by Will Porter.

VARIOUS LINES FROM THE POEM

"Degradation in a dark room did damage that could never be undone."

"A bottle of pills gave you more peace than prayers or promises ever could."

A door opens and closes. John tilts his head to one side at the sound of one shoe bouncing off the floor. Soon after, the second shoe thuds.

Heavy footsteps stumble up several stairs. A door closes upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

GAIL PORTER, mid-40s, works on a crossword puzzle in bed.

John sits on the edge of the bed, just out of reach of the light emanating from Gail's bedside lamp.

GAIL

Will's drunk again. I know we said we'd cut him some slack this week, but we also agreed, John. No driving. If anything happened...

JOHN

You're right. I'll talk to him about it tomorrow.

John and Gail sit in momentary silence.

GAIL

Linda called earlier, by the way. She thanked us for the flowers and the note.

John nods approvingly. More silence.

GAIL (CONT'D)

Have you decided when you're going to clean out the basement?

JOHN

Soon.

More silence.

Eventually, Gail looks up from her crossword. She notices John, head down and deep in contemplation. Gail puts down her crossword and gets out of bed.

John stares at the ground, completely lost in thought. The sound of a flicked switch. The room lights up. John subtly reacts to the sudden brightness.

We hear the opening of a drawer and some shuffling around. Gail sits down on the side of the bed next to John. In her lap, an untitled book with a red cover.

John looks at Gail, then at the book.

INT. STUDY -- NIGHT

John sits at his desk. The book with the red cover is open. He takes a big sip of whiskey.

INT. BATHROOM -- NIGHT

John stares blankly at himself in the bathroom mirror. He takes off his t-shirt, revealing a large scar that starts at the top of his belly button and curves up and to the left, ending at the start of his back.

John touches the scar as he continues to look at himself in the mirror. During this lengthy moment of examination, we hear John talking from a different location. He sounds almost sermon-like in his delivery.

As John talks, we hear the muffled groans of another man.

JOHN (V.O.)

When I was a boy, I knew a man like you. He was a man I thought I could trust. Unfortunately, I would soon come to discover that this trust was grossly misplaced. They were relatively small improprieties at first. The occasional crude joke when he knew I was within earshot. The reassuring touch on the shoulder that lasted just a second too long. These improprieties later began to escalate. Eventually, they escalated to the point where even a young boy such as myself with limited knowledge of the world could fully comprehend their violative nature. I soon became compelled to tell other people about these dark encounters. Other people who I thought I could trust. But, these people had a hard time believing my claims.

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

In fact, they didn't. You see, the man had fostered a great deal of respect in the community, and the notion that he could actually commit the atrocities that I was accusing him of was...well, it was inconceivable.

INT. BASEMENT -- NIGHT

John maintains his blank stare as he's bathed in the light of a single overhead bulb. His brow is dabbled in sweat.

In one hand, he holds the dagger. In the other, he holds the book with the red cover.

JOHN

When the man discovered what I had been saying about him, he became angry. So, he decided to hurt me. More than he had ever hurt me before. Now, in hindsight, the physical remnants of the man's violence towards me likely would've dispelled any doubts harbored by those who had previously discounted my accusations, but by this time, I demanded something more than the validation of those in a position of authority. Absolution. One day, I went to the man I had once trusted under the guise of a contrite boy who wished to give his confession. But, when the man opened his confessional to me, he did not find a contrite boy. I still remember the smell of onions on the knife blade before I absolved my would-be confessor.

The off-screen man's groans are now more panicked and desperate.

John uses the dagger to flip open a dog-eared page towards the back of the book.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I found myself going back to that difficult chapter of my life often as I wrote this book.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's a book that I have no intent of publishing, the reasoning behind which you'll soon understand. Still, it's served me effectively in other ways. As an important chronicle of unfortunate yet true events. As a stalwart guide when I've needed resolve. I'd like to read you a passage from it now. I'm certain you'll find it particularly enlightening.

EXT. DIOCESAN BUILDING PARKING LOT -- DAY

Two cars are parked in the lot at the back of the building.

INT. OFFICE -- DAY

As John reads, a PRIEST works at his desk.

JOHN (V.O.)

"He had lapsed in his faith long ago, but he still recalled the words of the eucharistic prayer from his youth. This is my body. This is my blood. Words that his victim had uttered countless times before. They were words of sacrifice freely given. Yet, his victim knew nothing of true sacrifice. He had only defiled and desecrated. Indulged in a sacrifice that could never be virtuously offered up."

A SECRETARY bursts into the priest's office. She's clearly distressed. She urges the priest to follow her.

EXT. DIOCESAN BUILDING FRONT ENTRANCE -- DAY

From the front steps of the building, we see a several magnificent trees amidst a field of lush, green grass. It is a beautiful day.

INT. HALLWAY -- DAY

The secretary and the priest rush frantically down the long hallway. They push through the front door.

EXT. DIOCESAN BUILDING FRONT ENTRANCE -- CONTINUOUS

They rush down the steps. They look up at the area just about the door. The priest contorts his face in horror. The woman begins to scream and sob.

JOHN (V.O.)

"Just as the victim's life was an abhorrent contradiction of his constant proclamations, so his death would be a profane manifestation of the eucharistic prayer. Body unwillingly offered. Blood violently spilt. It would be a warning. A promise. The culmination of a new liturgy."

A beam of sunlight reflects off the mutilated body of PATRICK O'LEARY.

He is nailed above the door lintel via a single nail through the neck. His corpse is dressed in white ceremonial robes. His body has been split by a knife both lengthwise and crosswise. His guts hang out.

FADE OUT.

THE END