

Mass Appeal

by Bill C. Davis

The Play: This thoughtful, powerful, and funny play deals with the generation gap found in the priesthood. Mark Dolson, a young seminarian, comes to study and work with Father Tim Farley, an older priest who has burned out internally (his faith and his passion), but has years of experience in the showmanship of the priesthood. When young Dolson begins to call Father Farley on his sloppy, passionless, theology and on his contradictions in his life, the fire roars. Before it is over, both men learn from one another and form a bond.

Time and Place: The present. Autumn. The office of Father Tim Farley and the St. Francis Church.

The Scene: Mark (early twenties) gives his first sermon at St. Francis. He has just been introduced to the parishioners by Father Farley with: "There's a certain James Dean quality about him which I think you'll find very exciting. Will you welcome please—Deacon Dolson."

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MARK: Thank you Father Farley. It's funny—I never stopped to think that on my way to becoming a priest I'd have to live with the name, Deacon Dolson. It sounds pretty silly, don't you think? "Deacon Dolson." (A cough—he freezes.) Can I ask all of you a question? Why did you come to mass today? What brought you to church this morning? As a teenager I had a friend who answered this question by saying, "I go to mass because my parents go." But one day, I heard his father talking to my father: "Betty and I go to mass because of the kids." (Coughs.) I know when I was young, I liked going to church because right after mass my father would take us to the bakery. And all four of us—my two sisters and my brother and

myself—would pick out what we'd like. I'd almost always get jelly doughnuts, and I'd never wait to get home before having one... (Coughs.) Anyway—jelly doughnuts aren't a very good reason for going to mass, are they? (A missal drops.) What are your reasons... (Coughs.) I wonder if the coughing lot of you know, or try to know why you pull yourselves out of bed every Sunday morning and come here!? (Silence.) Do you need to come to mass? Do you need the church? Ideally, the purpose of the church is to become obsolete. But until it is, we need the habit of coming together and collectively recognizing that there is another world. There is a world that coexists and gives order to this world. Individually, we come to mass with our own personal chaos and together we look to be ordered. We must come with our hearts open for that. (Coughs.) But you come here with your mink hats and your cashmere coats and your blue hair—that doesn't change anything. Those things are your shackles—they are accessories you've made essential—you are essential. You come here a faceless mass—you wear your prison uniforms as if they were badges. You're slaves all week—do you want to be slaves here too...

The Scene: After Father Farley admonishes Mark for his recent sermon, Mark defends himself.

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MARK: I know what they could be.

[TIM: But Mark—what about what they are? What are they to you?]

MARK: (Pauses.) They're my family. They get to me. But I don't know how to get to them. Show me.

[TIM: (Pause.) St. Francis got completely undressed in the middle of his town square—he gave all his clothes back to