

MIDNIGHT MASS: Between Catholic Faith and Atheist scorn and drama?

Three years ago, a horror movie had been released: *Midnight Mass*, a movie framed around a set of beliefs, feelings and thoughts anything but ennobling the Catholic Faith and beliefs. Since then, numberless Catholics – faithful, seminarians and priests alike - have been posting excerpts from *Midnight Mass*, to express a priori their belief in the Eucharist, as well as the power and miraculous virtues contained in such great a mystery, that the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ is. However, do any of those Catholic faithful realize what the movie *Midnight Mass* is really all about, before spontaneously and instinctively posting such excerpts on various social media handles? In other words, is the movie *Midnight Mass* suitable to express faith in the Eucharist, as believed in the Roman Catholic Church?

In an attempt to answer such a thorny and delicate question, the *English Bible Class of Our Lady of China Parish*, (Xindian) took upon themselves to delve into the deep waters of *Midnight Mass*, in order to bring a beacon light of authentic Catholic faith, as we raise alarm on the dangerously steady trend of misleading the Christian heritage of Faith in a world drowned in information, yet lacking in discernment.

1- **What is the Content of *Midnight Mass*?**

An old priest is unwillingly fed on a Vampire's blood in a cave, and is thereby rejuvenated. Overwhelmed, the priest started worshipping the vampire as his angel. Among other consequences, the demonic vampiric angel will use the old priest to destroy the faith and life of the inhabitants of Crockett Island, a formerly quiet and modest place.

The movie *Midnight Mass* explores questions of faith, doubt, good and evil, life and death, a stand-in struggle with sobriety. Vampires have long been associated with religious symbols and practices, which provided an

excellent channel for the author to explore the nuances of religious fanaticism with dire, horrific consequences; but the more terrifying monster is the blind believer who makes other believers turn from their original doubtful attitude towards the priest to worship him.

Moreover, the movie director divides its characters into three types of believers: fanatics, Blind Believers and Devotees. Each character portrays different experiences and thoughts at various stages of life, as well as contrasting attitudes of faith.

As expected, the story ended in tragedy: A priest-vampire using his blood as Mass wine, killing a young parishioner in the process, to feed on his blood; parishioners themselves transformed into vampires; and the demonic vampire himself coming for the great Carnage during the Midnight Mass of Easter Day, at Saint Patrick's Catholic Church, etc...

II - Relationship between *Midnight Mass* and our Catholic Faith

Midnight Mass: a struggle between desires, wants, ambitions and Faith. What do we pursue in life? Long life at all costs? Keeping young forever, regardless the price to be paid? Is that God's will or a temptation from the devil? Too often, we get used to mistaking our own desires, wants and cravings for God's will for us.

What is happiness, in this world? Is it everlasting? Or is it exciting but fleeting, prompt to bring regrets and remorse? What kind of consolation do we pursue in life, as Christians? Pope Francis gave an explanation of what true consolation ought to be:

"Consolation is an interior movement that touches our depths. It is not flashy but soft, delicate, like a drop of water on a sponge (cf. St. Ignatius of Loyola, Spiritual Exercises, 335). The person feels enveloped in God's presence in a way that always respects his or her own freedom. It is never something out of tune that tries to force our will; neither is it a passing euphoria. On the contrary, as we have seen, even the suffering – caused

for example by our own sins – can become a reason for consolation." The Catechesis on Discernment 9. Consolation, by Pope Francis, 2022

In other words, Consolation can never be synonymous with desolation. And as such, Catholics should carefully distinguish what is spiritual desolation from any apparent or fleeting consolation.

A sick priest who became an agent of a vampire; a priest who out of ambition became entrapped into the snares of a vampiric monster; a priest who became the devil's slave motivated by selfish ambition and other ambition stricken believers as well. *Midnight Mass* is a call to awake from our spiritual slumber: when Faith is contaminated by selfish desires, both Faith Leaders and Believers go astray, vanquished and crushed in darkness. Only love and self-sacrifice can ultimately bring our souls back towards the rays of spiritual sunshine.

As a matter of fact, while watching the Movie *Midnight Mass*, let us exercise discernment, keeping awake our own judgement, in order to keep the beacon of Catholic faith ablaze. Only then, can we look at this play from the perspective of a bystander, instead of taking an isolated fragment to represent the whole movie. For if anything at all, there are a great number of Eucharistic miracles, which are approved by Catholic Church, and are reliable and dependable enough, to express our Faith in the Eucharist.

It is our wish that this little space of brainstorming may dispel the boundaries of our simplistic knowledge, in a world more and more entangled between the abyss of multiple counter-catholic beliefs, trends and ideologies.

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Hosea 4: 6a - “My people perish for want of knowledge...”

歐瑟亞’4:6a - “我的百姓因缺乏知識而滅亡。。。 ”

《午夜彌撒》：一齣張力十足無神論用來嘲諷天主教信仰的戲劇

三年前，一部恐怖影集上映：《午夜彌撒》(Midnight Mass)，主軸圍繞在信仰、感受及不同的看法，唯獨不是以尊榮天主教的信仰為出發點。自那時起，很多教會內的兄弟姐妹，包含虔誠的教友、修士及神父，曾僅以其中某一片段，用來彰顯我們的主基督透過奧妙的聖體聖事所傳達之信仰、力量及奇蹟。然而，身為教友，單從各社交媒體流傳的片段影集，在我們不加思考的反應之前，我們是否瞭解這影集真正的涵義？換言之，這部影集《午夜彌撒》是否適合用來闡述我們教會對聖體聖事的信仰與崇敬？

為了嘗試回應這個難題，新店中華聖母堂英文讀經班投身探討《午夜彌撒》這部影集，在這資訊爆炸的世界，我們應當小心謹慎，許多危險的資訊不斷湧入，經常誤導我們偏離教會的珍貴信仰遺產，希望藉此為我們的信仰帶來指引。

I 《午夜彌撒》的內容為何？

一位年邁的神父在洞穴中，非自願的情況下接受吸血鬼的血液，得以返老還童。卻也因此將吸血鬼當成他的守護天使，欽崇牠。魔鬼般的吸血鬼藉由老神父來蠶食鯨吞摧毀居住在清悠小島 Crocket Island 上的居民他們的虔誠信仰。

影集《午夜彌撒》圍繞著信仰、疑惑、善惡、生命及死亡，交替掙扎。吸血鬼長久以來成為宗教的象徵及實踐，被作者當做一個很好的管道拿來發揮說明宗教狂熱者最後極端可怕的下場，但更令人驚駭是盲從者，如何影響其他教友從剛開始對神父抱持懷移，轉換到全然接受並追隨他。

此外，在劇中有三種人格型：狂熱者、盲從者與虔誠者。每種人格型代表不同人生不同階段的經驗及思想，對比不同階段的信仰態度。

意料中，此劇以悲劇收場。成為吸血鬼的神父將他的血當成彌撒的葡萄酒，過程中以有一位教友被殺害被餵以神父的血；教友們陸續轉變成吸血鬼；

復活節前的子夜彌撒時，吸血鬼天使(惡魔吸血鬼)蒞臨 ST. Patrick 教堂，展開大屠殺…

II 《午夜彌撒》與我們的信仰關連

《午夜彌撒》關於欲望、需要、野心及信仰之間交織的掙扎。汲汲營營生活的目的為何？不計代價長生不老？想方設法青春永駐？究竟是天主的旨意還是來自魔鬼的誘惑？我們經常錯將我們自己的私欲合理化成天主的安排。

在這世上, 快樂是什麼？永恆不朽？或是瞬間短暫的激情過後帶來懊悔沮喪？身為基督徒，我們追求的神慰該在什麼樣的框架下？教宗方濟各在 2022 年文告裡為我們說明：

“神慰是內在的活動，觸及我們深處。它不是一閃而過，而是細膩柔軟，如同一滴水落在海棉上。被上主的臨在包圍，仍擁自由，不會以混亂無序企圖凌駕於個人意志之上；也不會能互相傳遞的極致愉悅。相反的，我們因我們自己的原罪所看到的、所承受的，能成為神慰的源由。”

換句話說，神慰與神枯絕對不會相同。因此，身為教友，我們應該小心分辨神慰與短暫不持久以各種方式出現的神枯。

一位生病的神父成為吸血鬼的媒介；一位沒有野心的神父被吸血鬼惡魔箝制；一位神父因為自我私欲成為魔鬼的奴隸，也讓信他的人成為罪人。

《午夜彌撒》讓我們喚醒我們沉睡的心靈：當信仰摻雜個人私欲，信仰領袖及追隨者都會誤入歧途，墮入黑暗、泯滅良知，唯有愛及自我犧牲最終能拯救我們的靈魂活在靈性的光照之下。

事實上，透過觀看《午夜彌撒》，給予我們重新練習靈修操練，警醒我們自己的判斷，讓教會之光能持續發光發熱。我們當以旁觀者角度來欣賞這影集，而不是擷取獨立的片段來代替整部影集所要傳達的意義，因為它完全無關於教會認可的聖體聖事的奇蹟及信仰的真義。

在這訊息爆炸，卻充斥偏頗、世俗化的錯綜複雜世界裡，我們希望透過虔敬、踏實的討論，積極深入各種違反教會教導、媒體氾濫及意識型態充斥

的深淵，以超越我們知識不足的藩籬，幫助彼此的靈性從屬世價值的束縛中脫繭而出，振翅高飛。

歐瑟亞 4:6 “我的百姓因缺乏知識而滅亡”

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