

MATINS

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CAST: Two large men in their 50s.

MONSIGNOR: dressed as the title implies for informal day wear

SCIACI: (Ski-a-chi) in a well tailored suit

INTERCOM VOICE = OFFSTAGE VOICE: female 20-60

SET: Monsignor's office: a large polished wood desk with high back chair, surrounded by expensive bookcases, shelves, & standard office furnishings

AT RISE Monsignor is kneeling beside his desk clutching a rosary in prayer.
(Kneeling may be theatrically inconvenient, but is necessary for authenticity.)

INTERCOM VOICE

Monsignor.

MONSIGNOR

Yes.

INTERCOM VOICE

Mr. Sciaci would like to see you.

MONSIGNOR

Does he have an appointment?

INTERCOM VOICE

No, but...

MONSIGNOR

So make him an appointment.

INTERCOM VOICE

I tried.

MONSIGNOR

[Gets up. Goes to his computer & fiddles with the mouse.]

What's wrong? I'm not booked up already, am I?

INTERCOM VOICE

No, but... uh...

MONSIGNOR

What?

INTERCOM VOICE

Mr. Sciaci says he doesn't operate like that.

MONSIGNOR

"Doesn't operate like that?"

OFFSTAGE VOICE

Mr. Sciaci, excuse me. You can't go in there.

[Enter SCIACI.]

SCIACI

Pardon me, Father. This will only take a minute.

MONSIGNOR

[stands]

Mr. Sciaci, I'm right in the middle of matins.

SCIACI

Forgive me, Father. I know what I'm doin'.

[closes the door behind him, reaches in a pocket, and pulls out a check.]

Here's a little something for the Bleedin' Heart Fund.

[Hands Monsignor the check.]

MONSIGNOR

You mean the *Immaculate* Heart Fund?

SCIACI

Whatever.

MONSIGNOR

Mr. Sciaci, I'm not a Father. Priests are Fathers. Please address me as either Your Holiness, or Monsignor.

SCIACI

Sorry, Your Holiness. My mistake.

MONSIGNOR

[adjusts his glasses to look at check as SCIACI sits in a comfortable chair]

Oh! This is very generous, Mr. Sciaci. Have a s...
 [sees that Sciaci is seated]
 ...a cup of coffee. Would you care for some coffee?

SCIACI

No thanks.

MONSIGNOR

[sits] What can we do for you today?

SCIACI

Well, I been thinkin' ... uh... maybe it's about time I started doin' more for the Church.

MONSIGNOR

I'm very pleased to hear that.
 What exactly did you have in mind?

SCIACI

Oh. I don't know. A little here; a little there. You know.

MONSIGNOR

Uh... Fine!

SCIACI

And I figured it's about time you and me started to get to know each other better, you know.

MONSIGNOR

Uh huh.

SCIACI

I mean, I been a member here since I was a kid. My family's been in this parish longer than you have. We got roots together, you and me. Lot of mutual concerns.

MONSIGNOR

Oh... I'm sure.

SCIACI

And you know, Father Tuci - God rest his soul - he was my confessor. You knew that, right?

MONSIGNOR

Uh... yes.

SCIACI

He ever mention me?

MONSIGNOR

No! Not by name, of course. He may have mentioned you in passing, but nothing... uh... of a personal nature.

SCIACI

Hmh! I'm surprised.

MONSIGNOR

Why would you be surprised?

SCIACI

Well I thought, you being his confessor and all, maybe he might have said some things...

MONSIGNOR

No! Definitely not! Priests never talk about their confesseees, even in their own confessions. And even if he referred to you indirectly, there were no names, so I have no way of knowing anything about you, whatsoever. Father Tuci was tight as a clam. I had to drag confession out of him.

SCIACI

Yeah, I really liked Father Tuci. Damn shame. I cried like a baby. But... accidents happen. Life goes on, right?

MONSIGNOR

Would you care for a glass of cognac, Mr. Sciaci?

SCIACI

Thanks, I'm fine.

MONSIGNOR

I hope you don't mind if I have one.

[MONSIGNOR gets up and goes to liquor cabinet, pours a glass.]

SCIACI

Be my guest. Be your own guest, you know? It's your place. Hell of a priest, Father Tuci. He's gonna be hard to replace. But, replace him we must, right? How do they do that? Archdiocese send somebody down, or what?

MONSIGNOR

The archbishop gives me a choice of four or five prospects. I've started reviewing resumes.

[MONSIGNOR returns and sits.]

SCIACI

That's nice. They give you some choice - that's good. Does the new guy just automatically inherit Father Tuci's confession people?

MONSIGNOR

No, not automatically. Everyone has the right to choose their own confessor.

SCIACI

Zat right?

MONSIGNOR

Yes - as long as it's a mutual... sort of thing.

SCIACI

Why wouldn't it be mutual?

MONSIGNOR

Well, nothing. Just chemistry, you know. Different strokes...

SCIACI

Are you sayin' a priest might refuse to...

MONSIGNOR

No! Never. Refusal to confess a person would be inexcusable. Grounds for dismissal.

SCIACI

Mmmh... Okay. Another thing I was wondering about... uh... dossiers. Do priests keep dossiers on their...

MONSIGNOR

Absolutely not! No records of any kind.

SCIACI

Mmmh... Actually my main concern... You can probably sense it... is uh... trust, you know?

MONSIGNOR

Well, I can certainly appreciate your concern, but confidentiality is absolutely guaranteed. You know the laws...

SCIACI

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know the laws, and the laws don't guarantee shit, 'scuse my French, 'cause there's too many ways around 'em.

MONSIGNOR

Not the clerical confidentiality laws. Both secular and canonical...

SCIACI

I said I know the laws! I also know some dick head priest down in Florida, excuse the language, this miserable cock sucker was feeding information to the feds! *The feds!* And where are the laws? The laws put him in witness protection!

MONSIGNOR

Umm... I'm aware of the case. As I recall, there were allegations...

SCIACI

He did it! Miserable piece of shit! May his eternal soul rot in hell! *A priest,* for Christ sake! Please excuse me, Father. But this just... this just... this just... it makes me really angry, you know?

MONSIGNOR

The man was defrocked, as I recall.

SCIACI

Right. So he doesn't get to be a celibate and wear a dress for two grand a month. Poor baby. And now, God knows where he is. Nobody can touch him.

MONSIGNOR

Sure you wouldn't like a small glass of cognac?

SCIACI

No respect for tradition. That's the problem with this whole country. Right down the toilet. I mean if this guy was one of your priests, what would you do?

[SCIACI leans forward, looks him straight in the eye]

MONSIGNOR

Well, I'd fire him on the spot.
That's totally unprofessional! [pause] *Unacceptable!*

SCIACI

Yeah? [expects more]

MONSIGNOR

Intolerable! [finishes his cognac]

SCIACI

Uh huh... [expects more]

MONSIGNOR

[gets up, takes his glass to liquor cabinet.]

Uh... of course there are a lot of things I'd like to do, but I wouldn't be able, because the law doesn't let me - man's law or God's law.

SCIACI

Yeah, gimme a glass of wine. I'll take you up on that.
Thank you very much.

[MONSIGNOR takes a large gulp.]

SCIACI

Hey, go easy on that stuff. Rot your liver out, you don't watch it. Father Tuci, rest his soul, he drank like a fish. I kept tellin' him. Didn't listen.

MONSIGNOR

I knew that - that he drank. [Gives a glass to Sciaci & sits.]

SCIACI

Fuckin' fish. Pardon the expression. [Takes a delicate sip]
 And how do you guard against it? Huh? [pause]
 A priest goin' bad. How do you know? They got no wife,
 no kids, no roots in the community, nothin' to lose.
 [takes another sip] You ever confess people, Your Holiness?
 - besides priests I mean.

MONSIGNOR

It's been a while - long while.

SCIACI

I was thinkin' uh... maybe you could be my confessor, you know?

MONSIGNOR

Uh... that's really flattering, Mr. Sciaci.

SCIACI

Vinny. Call me Vinny.

MONSIGNOR

Actually the church tends to frown on administrators
 taking on the duties of lower clergy.

SCIACI

Who's to know?

MONSIGNOR

Well, the confessional is right out in plain sight.

SCIACI

I never use the box. Father Tuci and I agreed on it - for his
 safety as well as mine. Know what I mean? And I don't make
 appointments for the same reason. [stands up, looks around the room]
 It's not like I'm bein' an asshole; it's just - you know -
 it's not good for people to know I'm gonna be at a certain
 place at a certain time. [goes to the phone jacks in the wall]
 Are these your only phone lines?

MONSIGNOR

Yes.

SCIACI

[unjacks the phone lines]

Intercom hooked up to the same line?

MONSIGNOR

Yes. Excuse me, what are you...

SCIACI

Now I realize this kind of arrangement can be an inconvenience, but there are compensations.

[comes back and sits down]

Like that check for the Heart Fund, that was just tip of the iceberg. I'm a very charitable person. I do more charity in a year than I can even write off. I pay taxes; you know that? Huh? Bet you didn't think I pay taxes, did you? Huh? Come on.

MONSIGNOR

No, I...

SCIACI

Come on. You don't have to play the game with me. You know, most of my charities are off record. Father Tuci happen to mention that?

MONSIGNOR

Uh... no.

SCIACI

Yeah, I know you got a shit load of worthy causes here; pardon the expression.

[reaches in his pocket, pulls out a fat envelope]

And frankly I wouldn't know which ones are more deserving.

[plops the envelope down on the desk]

So... I'll leave that to you.

[sits smiling, waits for a response that doesn't come]

Just like Jesus said, right?

MONSIGNOR

I beg your pardon?

SCIACI

"When you give your charity, be not as the hypocrites, sounding a trumpet and shit like the Pharisees and publicans. But rather do it secretly, and my Father who is in heaven shall reward you openly."

[sits smiling, waits for a response that doesn't come]

I pay attention. Bet you thought I just come to church for appearance sake didn't you?

MONSIGNOR

Uhh...

SCIACI

Come on, admit it. You thought that just because I'm in my line of work, I don't take religion seriously. Is that not correct?

MONSIGNOR

No!

SCIACI

Come on.

MONSIGNOR

No, really!

SCIACI

Let me show you just how serious I am.

[SCIACI reaches into his breast pocket.]

[MONSIGNOR suspects a gun.]

[SCIACI pulls out a rosary]

SCIACI

You see this? My mother gave me this on my tenth birthday, God rest her soul. It's been with me ever since. I want you to know I'm not just a homini-domini Catholic.

[crosses himself sloppily] I'm a true believer.

MONSIGNOR

True believer.

SCIACI

Since I was a kid.

MONSIGNOR

That's nice to know.

SCIACI

The Mrs. too. We got five kids, you know that? Had seven, but some didn't make it.

MONSIGNOR

I'm so sorry.

SCIACI

Forget about it. So uh... maybe you'd like to stop over for dinner some time - watch a video?

MONSIGNOR

I'll have to check my...

SCIACI

Next Friday? Bianca's a hell of a cook. Sea bass scaloppini. I know, Vatican Two, but were old fashioned. What can I say?

MONSIGNOR

Friday? Ah! *Damn!* I mean... Golly! I have a previous engagement.

SCIACI

Whatever. The invite's always open.

[SCIACI gets up to leave.]

[MONSIGNOR immediately rises and walks around the desk to show him out.]

MONSIGNOR

Thank you. Thank you. Uh... you said something rather interesting. You said you're a true believer.

SCIACI

Straight arrow, right down the line.

MONSIGNOR

So you believe in an afterlife?

SCIACI

Damn straight.

MONSIGNOR

With like heaven and hell, and all that?

SCIACI

Purgatory, God, Jesus, angels, all that.

MONSIGNOR

The whole thing.

SCIACI

The wad.

MONSIGNOR

What about the idea of uh... sin, and that sort of thing?

SCIACI

We're swimmin' in it! "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But if we will confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us".

[wraps an arm around Monsignor, & walks him to the door.]

You ever see that movie, Beau Gest? Not the one with that kung-fu Dutchman, the old one with Telly Savalas?

MONSIGNOR

Uh, yes.

SCIACI

[removes the arm to make hand gestures]

You remember that scene - it was right after some big battle. The legionnaires just wiped out a bunch of rag heads. And this one legionnaire pulls out a rosary; he starts praying. Other legionnaire looks at him; he says, "Hey! What the fuck you prayin'? How do you reconcile that with killin' all these people?" You remember what he said? - the prayin' guy?

MONSIGNOR

No.

SCIACI

He said, [pause] "How do you not?"

[SCIACI stares Monsignor in the eye to emphasize the profundity of the legionnaire's question. He repeats it.]

"How do you not?"

[SCIACI continues to stare directly at Monsignor as if expecting a response.]

[MONSIGNOR doesn't know what response is being asked of him, but wants to comply. Eventually he nods affirmatively as if understanding.]

[SCIACI suddenly embraces him in a bear hug.]

[MONSIGNOR's face is to the audience.]

MONSIGNOR

Is there anything you'd uh... like to confess?

SCIACI

[SCIACI breaks the embrace.]

No. I'm caught up. Thanks. But if everything works out right, I'll be back some time next week.

[SCIACI opens the door, turns]

Oh! Question - theological question, I was wondering. If a priest assigns you a bunch of Hail Marys and Our Fathers, and such, and you get behind - I mean really behind, and the priest dies. Do those roll over?

MONSIGNOR

Uh... I would think they'd roll over. Yes, the death of the priest is not... does not, uhh...

SCIACI

But you're not sure, right? Do me a favor. Look it up, will you? - for next week? Have a nice day.

[Exit SCIACI]

Blackout