

Long Live The Dead Pope (excerpt) a play by Andy Accioli ~ andy@andyaccioli.com

The Beginning:

Act 1

Scene 1

St. Monica's Nursing Home - Sondrio, Italy

Saturday, October 6, 2012

NURSE pushes wheel chair to
downstage center. SISTER ASSUNTA is
in wheel chair. On top of her head
is a 100 year old crown.

NURSE (*gestures to audience*)

Sister Assunta, look at everyone who came to celebrate your 100th birthday.

NURSE exits.

ASSUNTA stares into audience.

ASSUNTA (*after a lengthy pause, she talks slowly and laboriously*)

The pope, Holy Father Mark Peter, was murdered.

NURSE returns with a lit birthday cake.

NURSE

(*to audience*) Ready, everyone? Here we go. (*she sings*) Happy Birthday to you, happy birthday to you. Happy birthday, Sister Assunta, happy birthday to you.

NURSE leads clapping.

NURSE removes single lit candle from cake, holds
it while ASSUNTA blows it out.

NURSE

I'll be right back. I'm going to cut the cake.

ASSUNTA (*after a beat*)

34 years ago, Cardinal Santini became pope on August 26, 1978. He took the name Pope Mark Peter the first. September 28, 1978, only 33 days later, he was murdered. I was sworn to secrecy about the pope's death then sent to the cloistered Carmelite Convent of Saint Maria Gorretti to insure my silence.

End of Scene 1

Act 1

The Pope

Act 1

Scene 7

Balcony Overlooking St. Peter's Square

September 13, 1978 – 2PM

CARDINAL BEAUDREAU enters.

BEAUDREAU *addresses audience*)

Welcome, Catholic pilgrims from all over the world. Everyone, I present Pope Mark Peter the first.

POPE MARK PETER smilingly enters and waves. Gestures to quiet everyone. Once quiet, he blesses the audience.

MARK PETER

Benedictio Dei omnipotentis, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti descendat super vos et maneat semper.

MARK PETER stands in front of microphone.

I welcome each of you to St. Peter's Square. Most of you are able to find your way to visiting our many buildings, churches, shrines and basilica. Some of you may find it confusing. I get confused as well. Last Friday, for example, it was a rainy day so I went on my daily walk within the Vatican. I went up stairs, walked down corridors, stopped and chatted with our workers. I was so lost, I asked the first Swiss Guard I encountered to please show me back to my residence. *(MARK PETER chuckles)* Some of our buildings are many centuries old. Since becoming pope only two and a half weeks ago, I myself feel as though I am centuries old. *(he chuckles)* Last week was my very first papal audience. I realized that for me to stand in front of you giving a sermon was not unlike you being at mass in your home parishes. Instead of this, we have collected questions from some of you which with God's grace, I will attempt to answer. The questions have been added to the basket that Cardinal Beaudreau holds which I will select randomly. Due to time constraints I will be unable to answer all of the questions collected, please understand if your question is not selected. Cardinal.

BEAUDREAU holds basket for
MARK PETER to select a question.

A visiting pilgrim from St. Thomas' Diocese in Leichester, England would like to know "What training is required to become pope?" Good question. If you know the answer, please send it to me. All I did was show up at the cardinal's conclave which was convened to select a new pope after Holy Father James passed to glory. The other cardinals prayerfully selected me.

MARK PETER selects another question.

This question is from a visiting pilgrim, Angelina age 7, from Our Lady of Guadalupe Archdiocese, Mexico City. (*tries to read scribble*) “What do you were, were...oh, wear...What do you wear under your dress?” Trousers. Let me share a secret with you, Angelina, in the summer I intend to wear shorts. (*MARK PETER chuckles*) Cardinal.

MARK PETER selects another question. He reads lengthy question.

A very good question is being asked from a visiting pilgrim from the Diocese of Saint Joseph, San Antonio, Texas, United States. “Pope Mark Peter, when you were a cardinal, Pope James asked you to report on the church’s relaxation of its ban on birth control such as the pill, what did you report then as a cardinal and what is your view now that you are pope?” An excellent question. As cardinal, I did submit a report to Pope James. All collected reports were to remain sealed, however, somehow they made their way to being published. As I wrote - based on conversations with a number of cardinals, bishops, parish priests, doctors and world leaders – our church should allow artificial contraception, such as the commonly used pill, only by our married Catholic members. My view as pope has not deviated from my view as cardinal. You have my assurance that this topic will have primary consideration over the near future. Cardinal.

MARK PETER takes another question from the basket. He reads question and chuckles.

Molly from St. John’s Elementary School in Brisbane, Australia asks “Do popes eat people food?” (*he chuckles*) Yes, even popes eat people food. Although if I had my choice, Molly, I would eat the food I am sure you would prefer: candy, cookies, ice cream and cake. Cardinal.

Lights fade as MARK PETER reaches in basket for another question.

End of Scene 7
Act 1

The plot thickens:

Act 2

Scene 5

Bishop Andreikus' Office at Vatican Bank

September 28, 1978 – 3PM

ANDREIKUS is at his desk using his “old fashioned” computer, “huge” monitor, he two finger types.
Knock on door.

ANDREIKUS

Come in.

BEAUDREAU

Any news from Gino?

ANDREIKUS

He called me around twelve-thirty after his rather unpleasant conversation with the pope. Gino's urging of the pope to not make changes was to no avail. Besides our being removed, Gino and Bank Milan are out of the Vatican as well.

BEAUDREAU

How can Gino let this happen?

ANDREIKUS

He won't. He said to not worry he would handle it.

BEAUDREAU

Does he realize we have no time?

ANDREIUS

More than anyone else, he understands the urgency. Without the Vatican Bank and the Patrimony's investment, funds will dry up for Bank Milan, it will collapse into bankruptcy. Investor deposits will be in the toilet. Be assured, cardinal, he understands the urgency.

BEUAREAU

I too had an unpleasant conversation with Mark Peter. Before I forget, he knows all about our investment in Sereno.

ANDREIKUS

Impossible. How would he know?

BEAUDREAU

He knows all about it.

ANDREIKUS

What else?

BEAUDREAU

He's sending Cardinal Micholetti to Thailand. Cardinal Garnett's going to South Africa. Cardinal Benedeti to South Korea. I am the lucky one, I get to return to France and be demoted to co-patriarch in the same diocese where I grew.

ANDREIKUS

Don't worry these changes will not be made. You didn't tell the others about resigning.

BEAUDREAU

You told me not to.

ANDREIKUS

Good. These reassignments should be kept quiet.

BEAUDREAU (*nods in consent*)

What do I do about O'Malley? I told him I would call him back this afternoon once I had an answer for him.

ANDREIKUS

Cardinal O'Malley already spoke to Gino. You should not call him back. They will come up with an option for us.

BEAUDREAU

I hope so. It's been forty-three years since I left St. Claudia's Parish in Montpellier. How can I return in disgrace?

ANDREIKUS

You can't. You won't.

Phone rings. ANDREIKUS answers it.

Andreikus.

Lights up on CORSETTI downstage right.

CORSETTI

It's Gino.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

Yes, Gino.

CORSETTI

You said the pope takes Effortil for his low blood pressure.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

Hang on, let me verify this with Cardinal Beaudreau, he's right here. (*to BEAUDREAU*) Effortil, right? The pope takes Effortil for his low blood pressure, right?

BEAUDREAU

Yes, every night before going to bed.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

Yes. He takes it each night.

CORSETTI

Where does he keep this medicine?

ANDREIKUS (*to BEAUDREAU*)

Is this medicine in his bathroom?

BEAUDREAU

No. It is on the table, next to his bed.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

Next to his bed, on top of a table.

CORSETTI

Who would have access to his bedroom?

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

I would assume Father Ronci.

CORSETTI

What about Beaudreau?

ANDREIKUS (*to BEAUDREAU*)

Can you get into the pope's bedroom?

BEAUDREAU

Not really. Father Ronci's always at his desk, even when the pope takes his daily walk before dinner. Why do you ask?

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

The cardinal will be seen.

CORSETTI

For this to work, someone has to be able to get in unnoticed.

ANDREIKUS (*after a beat/into phone*)

I told Father Ronxi that I would deliver the fax from Garber at Alpine about the account numbers as soon as I got it. I could wait to deliver the fax until after the pope leaves for his walk.

BEAUDREAU

What about Ronci?

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

I'll tell him that I would prefer to leave it on the pope's desk in his private study which is in his bedroom suite.

CORSETTI

Once you are in the pope's quarters, you will replace his bottle of Effortil with the one I will have delivered to you.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

I am quite sure his prescription came from the Vatican Pharmacy. He would notice the label change.

CORSETTI

There will be an identical Vatican Pharmacy label on it. Can you get Beaudreau's complete cooperation?

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

Yes.

CORSETTI

You sure? Even if it involves the death of Mark Peter?

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

Positively.

CORSETTI

Would Beaudreau have access to the bedroom in the morning? It is essential that he removes the medicine that you will place on the bed table tonight. The original bottle of medicine has to be put back.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

I'll explain this to him.

CORSETTI

You have to make him understand, we will hang unless he switches medicine bottles.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

I'll take care of it.

CORSETTI

He must also remove any of the pope's personal papers. Some of these might reference all the changes the pope wants to make.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

Not a problem.

CORSETTI (*into phone*)

Also in Beaudreau's role as Secretary of State, he becomes acting leader of the church upon the pope's death. He must stop an autopsy. The sooner the body can be embalmed, the sooner all evidence in the corpse will be compromised.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

I understand.

CORSETTI

Beaudreau has to send Ronci and the nun far from the Vatican and the press.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

He'll do that.

CORSETTI

What time does the pope take his daily walk?

ANDREIKUS (*to BEAUDREAU*)

The time Mark Peter leaves for his walk?

BEAUDREAU

Four thirty to five.

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

Four thirty to five.

CORSETTI

Have Beaudreau go on the pope's walk with him to ensure he will not suddenly return. I will make arrangements to have the medicine delivered to you within the hour. Any questions?

ANDREIKUS (*into phone*)

No. I will provide Cardinal Beaudreau with the details.

CORSETTI

Chao.

Lights out on CORSETTI.
ANDREIKUS hangs up.

Lights start to fade.

ANDREIKUS (*he thinks of an approach*)

Cardinal, does it disturb you Holy Father is destroying all you have built as head of the Patrimony including our vast holdings?

BEAUDREAU

Beyond words.

ANDREIKUS

How are you to handle your demotion from the Vatican back to Montpellier?

BEAUDREAU

I feel the humiliation will kill me.

ANDREIKUS (*a beat*)

Our Catholic morality is being threatened at its very core by Mark Peter's intention to abolish our traditional stance against birth control.

BEAUDREAU

I could kill the heretic.

ANDREIKUS looks relieved with a sadistic smirk
as LIGHTS FADE.

End of Scene 5

Act 2

The End

Act 2
Scene 8

St. Monica's Nursing Home - Sondrio, Italy
Saturday, October 6, 2012

Lights come up on ASSUNTA in a
wheelchair, the same position as at
the end of Act 1, Scene 1.

ASSUNTA (*she continues...from Act 1, Scene 1*)

That morning, I brought coffee to the pope at 4:45 as I did every morning. I knocked on the door to the pope's bedroom suite. Usually he would call out "Have a blessed day, sister". But there was no response. The lamp by the sofa was left on. When I turned it off, I noticed Holy Father on the sofa. I called his name. He would not awaken. I shook his arm. He remained asleep. This concerned me. He had no pulse. He was dead. I called Father Ronci who called Cardinal Beaudreau. The cardinal had the Swiss Guards seal off the residence. Father Ronci and I were both sworn to secrecy by the cardinal under pain of excommunication from our church. We were then told to immediately gather our personal belongings from our rooms as there were cars waiting to bring us to our new assignments: Father Ronci to St. Joseph's Parish in Camarina, Sicily and me to St. Maria Goretti's cloistered Carmelite convent. In my haste to leave the pope's residence, I realized I forgot my prayer book. When I returned, I witnessed the cardinal gathering Holy Father's papers which had fallen to the floor, stuffing them into his briefcase. He then removed a medicine bottle from his case placing it next to the lamp. The cardinal took Holy Father's medicine bottle from the table and put it into his case. (*a beat*) Holy Father, Mark Peter, was murdered. If telling the truth earns me excommunication from my church, so be it. I will not be silenced. (*a beat/quietly*) Long live the dead pope. (*after 1/2 beat/louder each time*) Long live the dead pope. Long live the dead pope.

Offstage voice joins this chant. Other voices
offstage join in...it appears that their voices come
from in back of the audience.

Long live the dead pope. Long live the dead pope. Long live the dead pope.

Lights start to fade.
Nurse enters.

NURSE

Time to get ready for bed, sister.

ASSUNTA (*quietly almost inaudibly*)

Long live the dead pope. He was murdered, the pope was murdered.

NURSE (*pacifying ASSUNTA*)

I know, I know, sister.

NURSE pushes ASSUNTA. Exiting.

Wasn't that a wonderful hundredth birthday party?

They exit.

Lights fade to out.

End of Scene 8

Act 2

End of Play