

INCORRUPTIBLE

Written by

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Based on,
The life of St. Jean-Marie Vianney
The Curé of Ars

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FADE IN:

INT. ST. PHILOMENA BASILICA - DAY

TITLE: FRANCE 1904

The church is a monument of faith in stone.

LABORERS toil throughout the church. They hang banners, retouch gorgeous frescos, and polish carved reliefs, in particular, one depicting a crowd being blessed by a priest.

A flesh and blood PRIEST (40s), wearing a cassock, cuts through the chaos to an area of relative calm where several WORKERS pry at a MARBLE SLAB in the center floor of the nave.

PRIEST

My friends, the ceremony is tomorrow. What is the delay?

WORKER 1

Pardon, Monsieur. It is a delicate thing, disturbing the dead.

PRIEST

This man is forty years buried. Are you afraid of dust and bone?

The workers look chastised and put their backs into the metal bars used to pry up the slab.

Sweat. Strain. CRACK.

The slab tears up from the ground, rising, revealing,

A FULLY FLESHED MAN.

CRASH - as the slab slips from their grasp.

CUT TO:

EXT. ST. PHILOMENA BASILICA - DAY

The priest and the workers flee out of the church.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. PHILOMENA BASILICA - LATER

Now a CROWD surrounds the fallen slab. A MONSIGNOR (60s) faces the marble then glances at the priest who stands wide-eyed beside him. The monsignor braces himself and gestures.

MONSIGNOR

Open it.

A NEW crew of workers pries at the slab. The massive grave cover is hauled aside and beneath it, amid the tatters of rotting clothes, lies a man, his flesh whole.

This is JEAN-MARIE VIANNEY.

Audible GASPS.

WOMAN

He's alive!

MONSIGNOR

No, look at the face.

The one exception. The skull shows through part of his visage.

A well dressed DOCTOR (50s) examines the corpse.

DOCTOR

But the rest of the body, his skin.
It's fully intact. How was he
embalmed? I don't see the marks.

MONSIGNOR

He wasn't.

MURMURS race through the crowd, many make the sign of the cross. The monsignor shakes his head as amazement lights his old eyes, and a smile tugs at his lips.

A HISS freezes his smile. He looks up from the corpse. The sound rasps, not from a person, but from the shadows...

SHADOWS which stretch, leaning away from the uncovered body.

DOCTOR (V.O.)

(as if from far off)
Monsignor? Monsignor!

The monsignor comes back to himself, focuses on the doctor.

DOCTOR

Forty years - in this earth? It's
not possible.

The old monsignor shakes his head.

MONSIGNOR

With this man - nothing was
impossible.

FADE TO:

TITLE OVER BLACK - "This story is based on official records and eye-witness accounts. This story is true."

"France, Ars-sur-Formans 1818"

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - MORNING

Thick FOG hangs low over the endless flat fields. Three shepherd children, a YOUNG BOY, an OLDER BOY, and a GIRL, call to their flock. The older boy turns to his friends,

OLDER BOY
Mes amis, I can barely see in this soup.

He calls again into the swirling gloom. Nothing. Then, the JINGLE of bells and the sheep coming running back out of the thick fog. The flock is herded by a FIGURE IN BLACK who emerges after them.

It is Jean-Marie, alive in his 30s wearing the cassock of a priest and wearing a three-cornered hat. He approaches the oldest boy who at first falls back at this seeming apparition.

JEAN-MARIE
My boy, can you point me to the town of Ars?

Something about Jean-Marie eases the young shepherd.

OLDER BOY
Oui Monsieur, just over that hill.

The priest puts a hand on the boy's shoulder.

JEAN-MARIE
My child, you have shown me the way to Ars. I will show you the way to heaven.

YOUNGER BOY
(under his breath)
How can he lead us to heaven if he got lost coming to Ars?

The girl starts to laugh, but the older boy shushes them.

At the crest of the hill, the new Curé of Ars stops and surveys the HAMLET below. It can barely be called a town.

It boasts about FORTY SMALL GRAY HOUSES built of clay brick, and a sickly looking yellowish structure made of stone, the CHURCH. The most impressive features are the river that runs nearby and the forest that borders the northwest fields.

Jean-Marie nods and kneels in the grass. The children look at each other, not sure what to do.

When the priest removes his hat to pray, the older boy does the same. Then, he glares at the other boy and girl, and they follow suit.

A silence falls on Jean-Marie, intensity fills his eyes - he sees something.

JEAN-MARIE

How small it is. Yet, this parish
will not be able to contain the
multitude of those who shall
journey here.

*

And a sheep wanders up and takes a bite out of his cassock. This jerks Jean-Marie back to the present, and the children can't help but giggle. He smiles, in turn, and rises.

OLDER BOY

Monsieur, who are you?

JEAN-MARIE

I am your priest.

EXT. ARS TOWN SQUARE - MORNING

Jean-Marie walks down the wide dirt road that serves as the town's main street. A dozen or so buildings crowd either side. He notices the largest and nicest of which are TAVERNS.

EXT. CHURCH YARD - MORNING

The church huddles at the far end of the main street. The low wall surrounding the church yard lays in crumbled disrepair.

When Jean-Marie opens the door to the building, the top hinge comes loose, and he catches the door just before it falls on him. He carefully leans it open.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Faint sunlight shines through the thick dust motes of this plain room of stone and wood.

It is a dump. Jean-Marie smiles. He couldn't be more in love.

The church is so poor it does not even have pews, only a few meager rows of straw-bottomed chairs. But it is his church.

He heads to the bell tower.

INT. CHURCH, BELL TOWER - DAY

Jean-Marie pulls on the old musty rope with both hands.

CLONG-clank

Jean-Marie looks up at the off-key sound and sees the BELL has a CRACK in it. But he pulls with such passion it could be the bells of Notre Dame.

CLONG-clank

EXT. FIELD - MORNING

A farmer, FAYOT (40s), rangy and worn, looks up from his plow at the sound of the bell. His FIELD HANDS do the same.

CLONG-clank

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - SAME

A DOCTOR (30s), thin, young and bespectacled, lays down a test tube and looks out his window at the church.

CLONG-clank

INT. LASSAGNE HOME, KITCHEN - SAME

A young woman, CATHERINE LASSAGNE (18), looks up from a book at the sound of the call. Her MOTHER turns from the sink.

CLONG-clank

INT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - SAME

The tavern owner, PIERRE MAYNARD (40s), a burly man with a handlebar moustache, stops polishing the bar as he hears the bell. A few of his passed-out PATRONS also raise their heads.

EXT. FIELDS -SAME

The children from before run in from the fields at the call of the bell. As they race down the hill, people from every direction can be seen making their way to the church.

INT. CHURCH, BELL TOWER - DAY

The young priest pulls the bell.

CLONG-snap

Jean-Marie looks up, then shields his head as the broken ROPE tumbles down on top of him.

He looks helplessly at the rope in his hands, then up at the unreachable bell, but gapes at what he sees out the window.

Knocking dust from his hair and shoulders, he makes his way to the open door.

EXT. CHURCH DOORWAY - DAY

The bell has done its work. The entire town has gathered before the church. (The townsfolk will refer to Jean-Marie as the Curé of Ars, meaning the pastor, or priest, of Ars).

Nervously, he clears his throat and addresses them.

JEAN-MARIE

Bon matin , Mesdames, Messieurs. I am Jean-Marie Baptiste Vianney, your new pastor. This place reminds me very much of my home, Dardilly. Well, actually, this is my home, now. I mean, I hope to make Ars my home. I mean, well - I think you know what I mean, but I hope to serve you well in the work of God.

Unconsciously, he rubs his hands on his cassock. He has started to sweat, and he wipes his brow - only to leave a dusty streak across his forehead.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

And... Mass! Mass will be available daily at 7am, and on Sundays at 9am. Catechism for the children will be in the afternoon, and there will be evening prayers every, uh, every evening. Of course, when else would they be? And that will be followed by rosary and confession. All are welcome, and the church will be open to you at any time. I look forward to seeing you at Mass. Merci beaucoup.

People look at their smeared new pastor, and glance at each other. Then, they make way as a horse drawn coach, ancient but stately, pulls up in front of the church yard. The old COACHMAN jumps down, opens the door, and lowers the steps of the carriage. A middle-aged woman, Mlle. DES GARETS (the Mlle. is short for Mademoiselle), in an austere but elegant gown, descends the steps and approaches Jean-Marie.

MLLE. DES GARETS
 I am Mademoiselle des Garets.
 Welcome, Curé Vianney, to Ars.

She extends her hand. The priest takes it and bows over it.

MLLE. DES GARETS (CONT'D)
 Your vicar-general informed me of
 your coming.
 (leaning close)
 You look - dusty.

Jean-Marie rediscovers the grime on his cassock on his hands.

JEAN-MARIE
 Ah, yes, I got intimately
 acquainted with the bell tower.

MLLE. DES GARETS
 I see. Our church is sad need of
 attention. Permit me.
 (handing him a
 handkerchief, loudly)
 Should you need anything, please do
 not hesitate to come and see me.

She gestures to a hill overlooking the town.

There sits the village's single largest building, the CHATEAU
 DES GARETS. Made of brick and marble, the country-style
 mansion gives the appearance of nobility and status without
 being ostentatious.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - SAME

People shake the priest's hand and introduce themselves.
 Deeper in the crowd, the farmer, FAYOT (40s), leans over to a
 fashionable young woman, MERE RENARD (30s).

FAYOT
 Doesn't look like much, does he?

MERE RENARD
 And his shoes, and that shabby
 cassock. They're like a peasant's.

MADAME LASSAGNE and her daughter, CATHERINE, overhear.

MADAME LASSAGNE
 I think he looks humble.

CATHERINE
 They could have at least sent us a
 handsome priest.

MADAME LASSAGNE
Catherine!

The farmer raises his eyes and Mere Renard giggles.

CATHERINE
Only joking, mama.

MADAME LASSAGNE
Well, let us say our hellos.

Across the square, the DOCTOR (late 30s) sidles up the tavern owner, PIERRE MAYNARD (40s).

DOCTOR
What do you make of it, Pierre?

PIÈRE MAYNARD
(chuckling bitterly)
You know better than anyone else it's all a sham. He'll lounge about all day, then sit in the church at Mass on Sundays and make everyone feel guilty if they do anything that even sounds like fun. Then, he'll milk the gullible for every penny, so he can live high on the hog and line his bishop's pockets. Mark my words, while he's duping us into giving him the shirts off our backs, he'll be having his way with our young ladies.

DOCTOR
Not a very high opinion of the clergy, I see. But, I admit, how a person in this Age of Enlightenment can believe in some fairy tale God you can't touch or see, I'll never know.

PIERRE MAYNARD
Pure stubborn ignorance, is how, M. Doctor. But I'll tell you now, if that black-robe messes with my business, I'll run him out on a rail, and I'm not alone in that thinking, either.

INT. SACRISTY - EARLY MORNING

Jean-Marie vests for Sunday Mass. He shrugs into an ALB which is like a high collared white smock. Over the alb, he puts on the VESTMENT, a colorful robe worn like a poncho. The young priest frowns, seeing that this one is threadbare and frayed.

He finishes by draping a white folded HANDKERCHIEF over his left arm, and steps through the door of the sacristy to serve Mass at his church for the first time

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

And the turn out is pitiful.

In the back sits an OLD FARMER (70s) , with white hair and moustache, and in the chairs before him sits the LASSAGNE FAMILY, Catherine, her MOTHER (40), FATHER (40s), and younger BROTHER (12). This farming family wears their patched and faded Sunday best.

Two OLD WOMEN sit in the front. One row behind them is Mlle. des Garets in the refinement of an old money aristocrat. A hung-over DRUNK lounges in the back and perhaps a dozen others round out the "congregation."

Jean-Marie notes the poor attendance but plunges ahead.

JEAN-MARIE

Bonjour, everyone and thank you for coming. This is my first Sunday with you, and I am a bit nervous. Please forgive me.

He starts the opening prayers. It becomes immediately evident that only the old farmer, Mlle. des Garets, and the Lassagnes know how to respond. It's a discordant, mess of a beginning.

The rest are either clearly lost, just watching, or bored.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

Jean-Marie now stands in the ambo.

JEAN-MARIE

(in Latin; subtitled)
Peace be with you.

SCATTERED VOICES (O.C.)

(in Latin; subtitled)
And with your Spirit.

One old woman whispers in a way where everyone can hear.

OLD WOMAN

I forgot how boring Mass can be.

Jean-Marie shoots her a pained look. Stealing a glance at the notes he has tucked in his sleeve, he begins.

JEAN-MARIE

My friends, you cannot please God and the world at the same time. The "world" meaning those who would offer you pleasure, fame, and riches.

MAN (O.C.)

(in a stage whisper)
Here, here!

The young priest looks up startled but does not see the heckler. The drunk YAWNS noisily. Jean-Marie tries again.

JEAN-MARIE

The world promises us everything we may wish for in this life, though it promises far more than it can give. Jesus Christ does not promise us any of this, but merely tells us of his consolation, "Come to me all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest."

Suddenly, a SNORE from the drunk cuts through the sermon. The new Curé begins to falter.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

And...and all that the...that the world offers passes and will fade with the end of our life.

The snoring revs to buzz saw volume. People begin to snicker.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

But - but, if we, uh, if we follow Jesus, he will aid us and...and after our snoring - I mean - suffering...

The snickering becomes chuckling and suppressed laughter. Jean-Marie freezes as panic comes over his face. His stammer becomes worse as he struggles to remember his homily.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

Uh, he promises us sleepiness, no...happiness! Which, uh, will last forgetful - I mean, forever. Which will last forever.

Now, he simply pulls out his notes and tries to find his place. Painful silence - punctuated by snoring - accompanies his frantic search. Finally,

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

And I can't remember what I was going to say next.

People openly guffaw. Catherine snorts with laughter. Her mother glares at her, and she pulls out a handkerchief trying to pretend she is blowing her nose.

One parishioner gets up and leaves. The banging of the ill-mended door wakes up the drunk who jerks up with a snort.

Mlle. des Garets glares the congregation into silence, and they settle down as the Curé trudges back to the altar.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Please stand and let us proclaim
the Creed of our faith.

Then something changes. When the young priest intones the litany of beliefs, the creed becomes more than memorized words but a prayer passionately proclaimed. The congregation starts to follow his intense invocation.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHURCH - LATER

During the consecration, Jean-Marie elevates the wine.

JEAN-MARIE
(in Latin; with English
subtitles)
This is my blood.

He raises the chalice with true reverence, neither showy nor self-righteous. The congregation watches in rapt attention. Everyone kneels, even the hung-over parishioner who joins the rest in making the sign of the cross.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHURCH - MID-MORNING

The small congregation trickles out, and Jean-Marie shakes hands and thanks them for coming as they leave.

Mlle. des Garets shakes his hand then pulls him close.

MLLE. DES GARETS
Young Curé. The Mass today - I've
seen guillotining that were less
painful. But you have a good heart.
Don't give up, M. Vianney.

The Lassagnes approach him after the gentlewoman leaves.

JEAN-MARIE
Thank you for coming and for your
patience. I promise to get better.

CATHERINE

Oh, I quite enjoyed it.

She doesn't succeed in hiding a smile. Her mother elbows her.

JEAN-MARIE

Do you know why there were so few people at Mass?

MONSIEUR LASSAGNE

Well, people are more than a little out of habit, M. Curé. And many are getting ready for the dance tonight.

JEAN-MARIE

Dance? Is there a special occasion?

MADAME LASSAGNE

No, folks around here will look for pretty much any excuse to dance. It's really the main entertainment.

JEAN-MARIE

(to Catherine)

And will you be going?

CATHERINE

Definitely not, M. Curé. I'm not that kind of girl.

JEAN-MARIE

Oh, is there something wrong with these dances?

MONSIEUR LASSAGNE

Why don't you go tonight, M. Curé? You'll see what she means.

EXT. ARS TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

The fiddle, and the flute, and the washboard call out a toe-tapping TUNE. The Curé enters the town square to find the party in full swing. Lanterns and torches line the square, painting everything in an orange glow.

The young and the young at heart of Ars flock the open dirt pavilion. The men and women are dressed to the hilt.

The three MUSICIANS stand on large, overturned wooden wash bins with the FIDDLER calling out the song and the moves. The taverns all have their doors open and patrons freely mingle.

Jean-Marie nods and smiles. It seems like old fashion fun. Folks notice him and some doff their hats or wave a greeting, while others look guilty and move away. Jean-Marie notices their discomfort and responds with a reassuring smile.

Then, the music shifts and the lyrics slowly move from rollicking to raunchy, and the dancers follow suit. The moves called out turn from fun to flirtatious, from flirtation to frisky, then from frisky to freaky. Jean-Marie's smile fades away, and he looks sternly at the crowd.

Couples steal kisses and a whole lot more as the dancing becomes distinctly un-Christian. Many of the older folk either jump in or laugh and point from the side-lines.

Shocked, Jean-Marie shakes his head, does the sign of the cross, then makes his way to the nearest tavern.

EXT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - NIGHT

A small group of women stand just outside the door. They appear miserable as they occasionally cast distraught looks inside. Jean-Marie tips his hat as he passes them.

JEAN-MARIE
Bonsoir, Mesdames.

One or two bob their heads in reply, but most do not even raise their faces.

INT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - NIGHT

The place is packed with the older members of the town, mostly men. The DRUNK from Mass spots Jean-Marie, puts an arm around his shoulder and a mug in Jean-Marie's hand.

DRUNK
It's the Curé! Come, join me in a
song. It's called "Napoleon: a
little man with big -"

He makes a cupping motion to his pants. Jean-Marie cuts him off before he finishes the sentence.

JEAN-MARIE
I'll have to pass.

The drunk shrugs and roars out the opening lyrics. A number of other patrons join in.

Jean-Marie pushes past the man and sees that many people are sloppy drunk, and cursing roils in the air. Every table has men gambling, either with cards, dice, or dominoes. The few couples inside are - well, they need to get a room.

A commotion starts as one of the women from outside the tavern, MARIE, has entered and now tugs on the sleeve of her husband, FRANÇOIS, who sits playing dice at a table.

MARIE

Please, François. That is our money
for food next week.

François grunts, brushes her off, and unsteadily, rolls the dice - snake eyes. Some men laugh, others groan, and a GAMBLER takes the pile of money in the middle of the table.

Jean-Marie approaches and sees François glare then push in the small stack of coins he has left in front of him.

MARIE (CONT'D)

No, François, I beg you. We don't
have enough for milk, if you lose
that we won't even have flour.

Suddenly, François stands and turns on Marie.

FRANÇOIS

Enough of your nagging!

He swings open handed to slap Marie, but Jean-Marie catches François' wrist mid-air, blocking the blow.

François looks at Jean-Marie in disbelief, then sees the cassock and collar. François shakes his wrist out of Jean-Marie's firm grasp.

FRANÇOIS (CONT'D)

I can't hit a man in a robe.

JEAN-MARIE

But you can hit a lady?

François notices Marie standing there, staring in shock.

FRANÇOIS

Get out of here, woman.

Without a word, Marie flees the tavern. Jean-Marie moves to help her when the burly frame of Pierre Maynard blocks him.

PIERRE MAYNARD

(low voice)

And where are you going, M. Curé?

JEAN-MARIE

To help that woman!

PIERRE MAYNARD

She's taken. Don't get involved in
other folk's business.

Jean-Marie glares at the barkeep then ducks around him to hurry after the lady.

EXT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

The young priest steps outside the ale house and sees Marie running off in the distance.

JEAN-MARIE
Madame, wait!

Another older woman, GERALDINE (30s), accosts him. She holds the hand of a toddler.

GERALDINE
For what? Our men are inside
drinking and gambling away the
bread on our tables. What does God
have to say about that?

Jean-Marie looks offended, but he continues after Marie.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Jean-Marie ducks down an alley in pursuit of the woman only to realize he has lost sight of her.

Two ragged, HOMELESS GIRLS who were hiding there, flee from him. He moves after them when he hears a WOMAN'S CRY.

It draws him to a DOOR in the side of the barn that forms one wall of the alley. The door is open a crack. He steps inside,

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

To discover a barn full of people, mostly younger, mostly couples...and they're not leaving room for the Holy Spirit.

Jean-Marie has stumbled into the 1800s version of a make-out room with bales of hay instead of bean bags and couches.

The WOMAN'S CRY comes again, from above. Jean-Maria looks up in time to be hit by a LADY'S FROCK that has been tossed down from the hay loft. It's followed by a WOMAN'S VOICE,

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.C.)
Antoine, you are terrible! Ha, two
can play that game, M. Fiddler!

Suddenly, a pair of men's breeches flies down, as well, and Jean-Marie just manages to side-step them.

A YOUNG FARMER, clearly tipsy, weaves forward to collect the clothing. He gestures to the loft.

YOUNG FARMER
You'll have to forgive our love
birds up there-
(MORE)

YOUNG FARMER (CONT'D)
 (interrupting himself)
 M. le Curé!

Couples freeze, turn and stare.

Jean-Marie recovers from his surprise and shock, only to find his indignation and anger.

JEAN-MARIE
 What is going on here? What do you think you are doing?

Then, stares turn to glares.

YOUNG FARMER
 What? Jealous, because you can't have any? Get out of here!

And other angry retorts immediately follow. Then it seems as if their eyes glow RED. Jean-Marie blinks and their eyes return to normal, but he backs off, shocked.

Yells and jeers chase him out the door.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Jean-Marie throws himself down in front of the tabernacle.

JEAN-MARIE
 Help me. Help me, God. I don't know what to do. These people are not evil, but they're so...lost. They don't respect you or your commandments, much less me. How can I help them?

Silence as he rocks back and forth in prayer. After a heart wrenching sigh, he pulls out his ROSARY BEADS to pray. He lifts the small crucifix and kisses it, then stops. He examines it a moment, then looks to the church's CRUCIFIX. The broken body, the whipped back, the pierced hands.

Jean-Marie looks into CHRIST'S SUFFERING FACE and nods.

He prostrates himself before the tabernacle.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
 My God, grant me the conversion of my parish; I am willing to suffer all my life, whatsoever it may please thee to lay upon me; yes, even for a hundred years, I am prepared to endure the sharpest pains... only let my people be converted.

INT. BEDROOM, PRESBYTERY - NIGHT

From beneath the bed, he pulls out a small DISCIPLINE. Into the tails of the little whip, he braids jagged stones and little bits of metal.

He kneels and strips off his shirt.

JEAN-MARIE
Lord, forgive me for my sins.

Then, he flicks the discipline over his shoulder. It cuts into his back.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Forgive my parish for their sins.

He strikes himself again. He intakes sharply as it cuts.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Lord...forgive me for my weakness.

CRACK! The whip hits.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Lord...

INT. BOUCHARD HOME - EVENING

A simple, one room house with a stone fireplace. MONSIEUR and MADAME BOUCHARD introduce Jean-Marie to their two CHILDREN, a boy and a girl, who sit at a long wooden table.

MADAME BOUCHARD
This is Jacob and Lisette.

JEAN-MARIE
(shaking their hands)
Nice to meet you.
(turning to the parents)
And when might they be available to come for catechism?

MONSIEUR BOUCHARD
I am sorry, M. Curé, I need them very much in the fields.

JEAN-MARIE
I understand. I helped my father with our farm at a young age, myself. But my papa always made time for God. It is good to work in this world, but we must also prepare for the next. Is there no time when they are not busy?

Monsieur and Madame Bouchard roll their eyes.

MONSIEUR BOUCHARD
(sarcastic)
Bien sûr, at the crack of dawn.

MADAME BOUCHARD
(also teasing)
Oui, on Sunday.

They chuckle, and the children smile at each other.

JEAN-MARIE
Perfect! I'll pick them up at 6am.

The adults look shocked; and the kids, horrified.

MONSIEUR BOUCHARD
Wait! But...

JEAN-MARIE
Thank you for your hospitality. I
will see you this Sunday.

And he is out the door.

INT. PRESBYTERY, KITCHEN - DAY

The Curé throws open the cupboards. They are well stocked. He pulls out food of all kinds.

EXT. GERALDINE'S HOUSE - DAY

The priest knocks on the door. Géraldine, the bitter, older woman from the tavern answers. She looks him up and down.

GERALDINE
Yes.

JEAN-MARIE
You asked me what God would say
about your husband drinking away
your bread. He said, "take mine."

He hands her a loaf of fresh baked bread from his own larder. She takes it speechless.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
He also said, if you are ever short
to come see me.

GÉRALDINE
I - well, I...

JEAN-MARIE

He has a lot more to say, but to hear it, you would have to come to Mass on Sunday. Au revoir, Madame.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Jean-Marie stands outside the main door and begins an animated conversation - with himself.

JEAN-MARIE

(looking at an imaginary person)

Hello, I'm the Curé of Ars.

(turns as if he was the other person)

Hello, I'm a godless heathen, ignorantly on my way to hell.

(again as the Curé)

Well, please come inside and tell me what you think of our church.

(as the heathen)

Don't mind if I do.

He feels eyes on him and turns. A GROUP OF KIDS stare at him, having just seen him talk to himself. They run for it.

He shakes his head... not a good impression. He opens the door and looks at the church as if seeing it for the first time.

Cracks spider-web across the roof. The whitewashed walls have faded to yellow, and the wooden paneling is sadly discolored.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - DAY

Jean-Marie pulls a purse out of a desk drawer. Coins jingle inside. Looking up, he notices the fine bed and furniture.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - DAY

Jean-Marie hauls a handsome bed frame into a horse drawn CART already piled high with most of the belongings of the house.

The doctor and Pierre walk toward the tavern across the street. They see him struggle but offer no help.

PIERRE MAYNARD

(to the doctor)

It's starting already. He's only going to want the best. That stuff simply isn't good enough for him.

EXT. CHATEAU DES GARETS - DAY

Jean-Marie stands outside the huge main door as he explains to Mlle. des Garets the overflowing cart sitting behind him.

JEAN-MARIE

I can't accept these items. They are simply too good for me. Please give them to someone in real need.

MLLE. DES GARETS

Of course, of course. But don't you want anything more?

JEAN-MARIE

Well - not for myself, but for the church... I have a few requests.

He pulls out a long list.

EXT. CHURCH, BELL TOWER - DAY

Jean-Marie counts money out of his purse, as a beefy BELLMAKER and his ASSISTANT haul a NEW BELL off the back of a wooden cart. The broken bell sits on the grass beside it.

INT. TAILOR'S SHOP - DAY

Jean-Marie examines vestment after vestment displayed by the TAILOR. Beautiful gold and silver embroidery adorns the colorful material. Still, the priest shakes his head.

JEAN-MARIE

No, I need the finest you have.

A small smile twists the tailor's lips, a gleam in his eye.

TAILOR

Very well. A man of taste, I see.

He claps and waves to his young ASSISTANT.

TAILOR (CONT'D)

Garçon, the best!

(to Jean-Marie)

Now, M. Curé may I also show you some excellent cassocks, made of the softest velvet?

JEAN-MARIE

No. Thank you, Monsieur. Nothing for me. But for God, only the best.

EXT. PICARD HOUSE - DAY

Marie, her face black and blue, opens the door. Jean-Marie is appalled. When Marie sees it is the priest, she turns her head, trying to hide the bruises on her face.

MARIE

M. Curé.

Jean-Marie sees it is time for love not a lecture. He offers his arms full of food.

JEAN-MARIE

I've brought your family something to eat.

She stiffens and backs away.

MARIE

I can't accept charity.

JEAN-MARIE

Oh. Oh, I see. Of course not. That is why this is a trade. You see, I, ah, just ran out of bread. Do you have some?

MARIE

Bread?

Confused, she returns inside and emerges a minute later with some crusts.

MARIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. All I have are these-

JEAN-MARIE

Perfect!

In one motion, Jean-Marie dumps all the items from his arms into hers and grabs the bit of bread. His stomach suddenly GROWLS.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

See, I am hungry.

He bites into it the crust. It gives a stale crunch. He struggles to chew.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

(mouth full of bread)

Mm. My favorite. Bonne nuit.

He leaves as the young wife looks at the plenty in her arms.

MARIE

Merci!

INT. CHURCH, BELL TOWER - DAY

The young priest climbs a precariously tall ladder to the top of the tower, the length of rope wrapped around his shoulder.

At the top of the ladder, he cuts down the frayed end of the rope.

He ties the rope to the new bell.

At the base of the tower, the new rope drops and dangles. Jean-Marie comes off of the ladder and pulls it.

BONG - clear and true.

He smiles.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

It looks brand new with fresh paint on the walls, elegant new paneling, and an impressive altar. Even the priest of Ars wears striking apparel of deep green embroidered with crosses of gold. He extends his hands.

JEAN-MARIE
(in Latin)
Peace be with you.

Unfortunately, the congregation remains tiny. The same handful of people from the previous Mass have come joined by a few others, including the two women from the tavern.

CONGREGATION
(in Latin)
And with your spirit.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Mlle. des Garets approaches him after Mass once again.

MLLE. DES GARETS
I am impressed, M. Vianney. It actually looks like a real church.

JEAN-MARIE
Now, I just need to fill it.

MLLE. DES GARETS
People's hearts are not so easy to change. It will take more than a fresh coat of paint.

EXT. ARS TOWN SQUARE - PRE-DAWN

A COCK CROWS as the sky turns from black to purple before the first rays of the sun.

INT. BOUCHARD HOME - SAME

A KNOCK at the door. It opens to reveal Jean-Marie.

JEAN-MARIE
Ready for Catechism?

EXT. RENARD HOME - PRE-DAWN

The Bouchard children trudge wearily after the priest as he knocks on this door, and ANOTHER CHILD, rubbing sleep from his eyes, comes outside.

EXT. PRESBYTERY

Jean-Marie returns with a train of sleepy children in his wake. At the door, he turns.

JEAN-MARIE
Before we enter, I want to thank
you all for coming to catechism.

This is met by mumbles and groans.

BOY
But it's so early.

JEAN-MARIE
I know, I know, but I'll make you a
deal. If you come on your own next
time, we can start at 6:30am, and I
will already have the room warm for
you. Also...

He pulls out two small HOLY CARDS. They are gorgeously hand decorated images of saints.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Who ever comes first gets a prize.
Like these.

He hands the cards to the Bouchard children. Lisette gasps with delight, but Jacob does not look so thrilled.

JACOB
But this is a girl saint.

JEAN-MARIE
Oh, here.

He gives the boy a card of St. George killing the dragon.

JACOB

Merci!

JEAN-MARIE

Is it a deal?

A resounding "yes" from his young crowd.

INT. CHURCH - EVENING

Jean-Marie kneels in front of the tabernacle and prays his rosary. His lips move silently, but his eyes beg and plead, and every so often little gasps and moans escape from his lips. He finishes by prostrating himself on his face.

Then his stomach GROWLS.

JEAN-MARIE

Lord, you are my bread.

His stomach growls again.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

But I might need some fruits and vegetables.

INT. PRESBYTERY, KITCHEN - NIGHT

The priest opens the cupboards. Stark empty. He looks out the window and sees a COW grazing his yard.

EXT. PRESBYTERY, GARDEN - NIGHT

Jean-Marie tears up fistfuls of grass. He looks up and sees the cow staring at him. He puts a finger to his lips. The cow turns back to its feeding. Jean-Marie takes a bite, and his face twists at the bitter taste.

He looks back at the bovine happily feasting. Steeling himself, the Curé stuffs the rest of his "harvest" into his mouth and forces himself to chew and swallow.

Then he notices a large overturned TREE STUMP by the wall.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - DAY

Jean-Marie hauls the log into the room.

He lays down on the floor, using the log as a pillow.

INT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - DAY

Jean-Marie enters. Pierre Maynard polishes the bar. The big man looks up at the little priest.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Bonjour, M. le Curé. To what do I owe this honor?

JEAN-MARIE

I've been trying to get to know everyone in town, but I think we started off on the wrong foot. I came to start fresh and say hello.

PIERRE MAYNARD

That deserves a round on the house.

Pierre fills a tankard from the tap and expertly slides it to the priest.

PIERRE MAYNARD (CONT'D)1

That's my own home brew.

Jean-Marie catches it and sips. He nods appreciatively and looks around, noticing the other patrons.

JEAN-MARIE

My compliments. Business seems good. And how is your family?

PIERRE MAYNARD

My boy is well.

JEAN-MARIE

Oh, you have a son? Well, by all means, I would like to invite your wife and your son to Mass on Sunday.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Would you now? Because my boy's mother and I aren't married. No intention to be. And I'll wager you might have an objection to that.

JEAN-MARIE

Well, I think God has an objection to that. I think he calls us to be true and to be devoted -

PIERRE MAYNARD

And I think that's all your kind does. Judges people. You peddle guilt, so people will buy into your system or do whatever you tell them.

(MORE)

PIERRE MAYNARD (CONT'D)

Well, what would you say, if I told you that I think the Revolution had it right when they outlawed your Church and kicked your kind out of the country?

A hush falls over the entire tavern. All eyes on the two men.

JEAN-MARIE

Monsieur, I grew up during the Revolution. They promised us freedom, peace, health and enlightenment. Then, they outlawed religion, and got rid of 'my kind', the priests and religious. They effectively shut down the majority of schools and hospitals, since us 'guilt peddlers' were almost solely responsible for such under-handed things as taking care of the sick and educating the poor.

A few patrons unconsciously nod at the truth of his words.

JEAN-MARIE'

And now, our emperor, Napoleon, is fighting all of Europe. So, instead of giving us freedom, peace, health and enlightenment, what the Revolution has actually done is left us ignorant, ill, oppressed and at war. That's what I have to say.

PIERRE MAYNARD

You can go to hell.

JEAN-MARIE

My friend, I'm trying to keep both of us from going there.

With that, the priest gets up and leaves.

EXT. OAK TREE TAVERN - DAY

The thin, balding PROPRIETOR cleans his windows. The JINGLE of money causes him to turn around. He sees Jean-Marie.

PROPRIETOR

Oh, bonjour, M. Le Curé.

JEAN-MARIE

Bonjour, Monsieur. How much money do you expect to make tonight, if you don't mind me asking?

PROPRIETOR
 Oh...no. I would say - thirty sous.
 Why do you ask?

The Curé pulls out a handful of coins from his money purse and hands it to the man.

JEAN-MARIE
 Here is the thirty...if you
 transact no business tonight.

PROPRIETOR
 But tonight there is a dance.

JEAN-MARIE
 Indeed.

INT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - AFTERNOON

Jean-Marie approaches the bar and sets down a much lighter money purse. Pierre examines the mugs he stacks at the bar.

PIERRE MAYNARD
 What do you want?

JEAN-MARIE
 How much do you expect to make tonight?

PIERRE MAYNARD
 Why do you care? It's not any of
 your business.

JEAN-MARIE
 I'll pay you whatever you expect to
 make, just shut your doors. All the
 other taverns have agreed to do it.

PIERRE MAYNARD
 Tonight's the fête. Are you trying
 to stop it? What do you have
 against the dance?

JEAN-MARIE
 It's not the dance. It's the
 drunkenness, promiscuity and
 violence that I object to. And the
 taverns help make that happen.

PIERRE MAYNARD
 Take your money elsewhere.

JEAN-MARIE
 Why? Why not take the money from
 me rather than from a man who needs
 it to feed his family?

PIERRE MAYNARD

Because if a man wants to drink,
who are you to stop him? Besides,
it would take a modern day miracle
to make me accept money from you.

The Curé sadly nods, dons his cap and walks away.

EXT. ARS TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Again the fiddler and his troupe hold court as the dancers
return to the same debauchery as before.

Looking on, Jean-Marie makes his way around the square.

He smiles grimly and nods as he passes one tavern after
another and sees the dark windows and closed doors. At least
there are no lines of women holding the hands of crying
infants standing outside these buildings.

EXT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Then, his smile turns to horror as he approaches the Horse &
Cart. The line of weeping women has been joined by a MOB OF
REVELERS as patrons literally spill out of the doors.

The crowd parts as Pierre Maynard hauls a drunk outside and
tosses him into the street.

PIERRE MAYNARD

And not another drop until you pay
up! Your credit here is - oh,
bonsoir, M. le Curé! As you can
see, business is booming! You
don't look so happy.

The Curé of Ars tries to help the DRUNK MAN to his feet.

JEAN-MARIE

As happy as the lamb to see the wolf.

The inebriate brushes the priest off with a grunt and
staggers into the night.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Too bad, because I quite like your
little plan. I've made more than
twice my usual take, thanks to you
shutting down my competition. In
fact, I wish you would do this
every fête.

Jean-Marie sags, turns and walks away.

PIERRE MAYNARD (CONT'D)
 Oh, don't be that way, M. le Curé.
 Dancers need to drink.

Jean-Marie stops in his tracks. He looks back at the bartender, then nods to himself.

EXT. ARS TOWN SQUARE - LATE AFTERNOON

In the fading sun, Jean-Marie finds the fiddler tuning his instrument in the shade of the trees lining the square.

JEAN-MARIE
 My son, how much do you and your boys make in an evening?

FIDDLER
 About fifteen sous, give or take, plus tips.

JEAN-MARIE
 How about I pay you double not to play tonight?

FIDDLER
 Ah, you don't much care for my playing, or is music and dancing against your religion?

JEAN-MARIE
 No, it is fine. In fact, music and dance can be quite beautiful. But what my people do when they hear your music, and what happens afterwards...is not.

FIDDLER
 Monsieur le Curé, It is my job to play and to let the people have fun. I love it. What they do afterwards is none of my concern.

JEAN-MARIE
 It is mine. So what do you say?

Jean-Marie holds up a small purse. The fiddler eyes it.

FIDDLER
 It's a deal.

INT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - NIGHT

Pierre finishes wiping the bar then he goes to the doors and throws them open. A half a dozen men wander in, no more.

PIERRE MAYNARD
What's this? Where is everyone?

Pierre opens the doors again to listen.

PIERRE MAYNARD (CONT'D)
Where's the music?

One PATRON shrugs.

PATRON
There's no band.

Pierre barrels outside.

EXT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - NIGHT

Pierre can see the upturned wash basins are empty, and so is the dance floor, except for a few well dressed would-be dancers who wander around looking confused.

Even the other taverns are almost completely empty.

He looks over at the church and hurls down his bar rag.

INT. PRESBYTERY - NIGHT

A KNOCK at the door. Jean-Marie opens it.

JEAN-MARIE
Bon-

A FIST decks him in the face. He staggers back against his table and Pierre Maynard barrels into the room.

PIERRE MAYNARD
You're behind this aren't you?

JEAN-MARIE
If you mean the musicians. I just gave them a more honest way of earning their wages.

PIERRE MAYNARD
And what about my wages? What gives you the right to take away a man's means of living?

JEAN-MARIE
I could ask you the same question. Isn't that what happens, when men throw away their wages on your drink and at your tables?

PIERRE MAYNARD

I don't have to answer to you.

JEAN-MARIE

No, then how about to their wives and children who stand at your doors every fête? And if not to them, then how about to God?

PIERRE MAYNARD

Enough! This town and I are done with your high-handed, holier-than-thou horseshite.

Pierre grabs Jean-Marie and tries to haul him out the door. The priest twists and grabs onto the table. He manages to hook his leg under the oaken piece of furniture.

A tug-of-war ensues between the barkeep and the table with the priest as the rope. Made of strong, sturdy wood, the table doesn't budge, but sweat and strain stains both men.

Another KNOCK on the door. Catherine Lassagne enters.

CATHERINE

M. le Curé! What is going on here?

Caught in the act, Pierre freezes mid-tug.

JEAN-MARIE

Oh, Mlle. Lassagne. The good M. Maynard was a, uh, demonstrating for me the, uh, struggle between good and evil.

(to Pierre)

You can put me down, now.

Abashed, Pierre complies.

CATHERINE

Oh...I see. Mère Bibost has your supplies. She sent me to tell you.

JEAN-MARIE

Very well. Please run and tell her I will pick them up soon.

After the girl leaves, the men stare at each other. Pierre mops his brow.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Struggle between good and evil? Clever. Don't start this struggle, priest. You see what it got you.

He gestures to the swelling bruise on Jean-Marie's cheek.

JEAN-MARIE
 Monsieur, Christ tells us, when
 someone strikes you, to turn the
 other cheek. You have only made my
 other cheek jealous.

He shows the barkeep the uninjured side of his face.

Pierre stares at him for a moment, then nods.

He DECKS the priest on the other cheek knocking him into the
 table, the books tumble off of it.

PIERRE MAYNARD
 You wanted a struggle? You've got
 yourself a war.

INT. HORSE AND CART TAVERN - AFTERNOON

A group of seven huddles around the bar. They include the
 doctor, the fiddler, and MERE RENARD, the town gossip.

FIDDLER
 He tricked me out of my work.

MERE RENARD
 He's prying into our personal
 lives.

PIERRE MAYNARD
 And he's ruining our business. All
 so that we'll obey his medieval
 idea of piety. He has got to go.

DOCTOR
 Don't you think you are over-
 reacting?

PIERRE MAYNARD
 Please, Doctor. Don't tell me you
 have fallen for his hocus pocus and
 superstitions?

DOCTOR
 Parting the Red Sea? Manna from
 heaven? People being raised from
 the dead? I don't think so. I am a
 man of reason. Which is why I say
 we let people make up their own
 minds. If they want to be gullible,
 so be it.

PIERRE MAYNARD
 Really? How long before he
 questions your use of science?
 (MORE)

PIERRE MAYNARD (CONT'D)
 This is faith versus reason. What
 about the Revolution? The
 Enlightenment?

The doctor is torn. He polishes his glasses.

DOCTOR
 What do you propose?

PIERRE MAYNARD
 Each of us can do something.

FIDDLER
 He ruined our nights. We'll ruin his.

MERE RENARD
 If he wants to ruin my reputation,
 I'll return the favor.

DOCTOR
 Well, I, for one, will not be part
 of some smear campaign.

PIERRE MAYNARD
 Smear campaign? Good doctor, we
 are simply using reason. If you
 don't want people to fall for those
 old fairy tales, isn't it your duty
 to do something about it? For
 example, people say our good Curé's
 sickly appearance comes from all
 his holy fasting. Please! Doctor,
 what would be another, medical
 explanation for his condition?

EXT. WASH LINE - DAY

Mere Renard hangs her sheets along side a NEIGHBOR who does
 the same. Mere Renard leans over conspiratorially.

MERE RENARD
 ...deviant behavior. That's what
 causes him to look so ill. See the
 way he harps on women? Their
 "piety" is not all he's after.

INT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - NIGHT

Passing the man a mug, Pierre Maynard confides to a PATRON,

PIERRE MAYNARD
 Too much drink, I tell you. You see
 the light on in the church into the
 late hours?

(MORE)

PIERRE MAYNARD (CONT'D)
 You think he's praying all that
 time? Sure, praying to the
 bottle...

The bartender turns his hands clasped in prayer into hands
 clasped around a bottle.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

The fiddler sits tuning his fiddle while resting his feet on
 a table. He speaks to a group of young men.

FIDDLER
 'Course I've seen him. Traipsing
 about nights. Doin' all the things
 he tells us not to. How come he can
 do it and we can't? That Curé...

INT. PRESBYTERY - AFTERNOON

M. MANDY, the red faced, pot bellied mayor, relates to the
 Curé of Ars:

M. MANDY
 "...is a hypocrite of the worst
 kind," they say. You are being
 accused of everything from
 alcoholism to adultery and worse.

Looking lean and haggard, Jean-Marie paces the presbytery.

M. MANDY (CONT'D)
 It's...it's not true is it?

Jean-Marie flares,

JEAN-MARIE
 Of course not!

Then the fire dies. He shakes his head.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
 Mayor Mandy, God knows I'm a sinner
 like the rest. But I did not commit
 these sins, and God preserve me
 from ever doing so. Besides, I'm in
 the church so much, when would I
 have the time? I work to the bone-

M. MANDY
 And that's the worst part. They
 point to your worn-out appearance
 as the proof of your guilt. You
 have to say something. Defend
 yourself!

Jean-Marie rubs weary eyes, looks at his emaciated body, and laughs bitterly, as if to say, "for what?"

M. MANDY (CONT'D)
M. le Curé?

JEAN-MARIE
Merci, Mayor Mandy. Thank you for you warning and your concern. I'll handle it from here.

M. MANDY
Of course, Curé. Forgive me, but you understand, I had to investigate. And I thought us elected officials had it rough. Adieu, M. le Curé.

The priest nods as M. Mandy lets himself out.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jean-Marie lays on the ground, his head on his log pillow, his eyes open, staring unanswered questions into Heaven.

Suddenly a chorus of voices cuts into the night.

MEN'S VOICES (O.S.)
(singing)
The Curé d'Ars, is quite an arse,
we know his holiness is a farce...

EXT. PRESBYTERY - NIGHT

The voices belong to a group of young men who stand outside of the garden, just out of sight of the Curé's window. The fiddler guides them as an impromptu conductor.

YOUNG MEN
...No wonder his congregation is so sparse.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jean-Marie leaps up and moves to the window.

YOUNG MEN (O.S.)
...An arse is the Curé of Ars!

He slams the shutters, muffling the singers' voices. He storms across the room and kicks the log. Ouch - that hurt!

He limps in pain around the room, and he finally sits on the log. He rubs his foot and stares forlornly at the window which still leaks the insulting serenade.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The Curé stands at the pulpit, distracted, defeated.

He starts to preach - then stops. One PARISHIONER whispers to another.

PARISHIONER

Wow, that's a record. Usually, he forgets what he was going to say in the middle of the sermon. Not before he's even begun.

Jean-Marie's gaze focuses on the small PAINTINGS lining the walls depicting Christ's passion, the STATIONS OF THE CROSS. He sees Christ fall again...and again.

PARISHIONER 2

Looks like, he lost his train of thought before it even got out of the station.

The two parishioners LAUGH. But in the images, Jesus never gives up. Never surrenders.

Jean-Marie clears his throat over the noise of the chuckling.

JEAN-MARIE

I had a sermon carefully prepared for you today...and it would've probably been unmemorable, touching no one. But I must be willing to preach the truth and to say what God wants me to say, and not just what I think you want to hear. I say it to help you, and because I love God and you. If it offends you...well, a priest must preach fearlessly, even if it means he must expect full well to be killed when he comes down from the pulpit.

(pause)

That being said, you are all headed straight for hell.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Jean-Marie gives bread to a HOMELESS GIRL and her younger SISTER. They bob their heads in thanks and trudge away.

The sound of a struggle catches his attention, and he turns to see a FARMER trying to push a sheep out of a ditch.

JEAN-MARIE

Can I lend a hand?

He jumps down in the ditch with the farmer.

FARMER

M. Curé! No, no. It's just...

JEAN-MARIE

Here. You get out of the pit.

The farmer hesitates.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

Trust me. Just grab her when I say.

The farmer climbs to the ledge.

Jean-Marie gets under the sheep, flips her upside down and lifts her like a newly wed bride up to the farmer. The farmer grabs her legs and plops her onto the grass where she gets up and gambols off to the herd.

FARMER

M. Curé...I don't know what to say that was - very clever.

JEAN-MARIE

Don't mention it. Though I might be known as the village idiot, I actually started as a farm boy.

FARMER

M. Curé, I never called you a...

JEAN-MARIE

Don't worry. Plenty have said it. And...they're probably right. Which might explain why there's something I don't understand. How far do you have to drive the herd each day?

FARMER

Oh, sometimes two or three leagues.

JEAN-MARIE

Is that pretty average for most folk here?

FARMER

Oui, M. Curé.

JEAN-MARIE

So folks here will walk three leagues for a single day's wage, but they won't walk fifty steps to the church to gain eternal salvation? Like I said, I don't understand.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The Curé continues preaching from the pulpit.

JEAN-MARIE

You are going to hell because you sin and because you do not live the faith. You say 'well, I attend church now and again.' Maybe you even have some small devotions. But that is not enough. You must live what we believe. You must love God and your neighbor. And you must stop sinning.

The congregation sits riveted. Nobody sleeps or heckles now.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

A WHEAT FARMER pitches alfalfa into a cart. Seeing the Curé coming down the path, he dives out of sight behind his cart.

The Curé calls out to him.

JEAN-MARIE

Monsieur, you seek to hide from me, but how will you hide from God who sees everything? It is Sunday, and I missed you at Mass.

Caught, the man comes out from behind the cart.

WHEAT FARMER

Ah, well, M. Curé, I had to get this wheat in today.

JEAN-MARIE

The payment for this wheat, how long will that money last?

WHEAT FARMER

Hmm. Maybe a week.

JEAN-MARIE

A week? I'll make you a deal. Come to Mass and let's work on gaining heaven. I can't promise you that it will be easy, but the reward will last forever.

WHEAT FARMER

M. Curé, merci but no. The church is full of hypocrites and the self-righteous.

Jean-Marie thinks for a minute and then nods.

JEAN-MARIE

Have you ever worked for a foreman
who was a fool or a pompous ass?

WHEAT FARMER

Oui, certainly.

JEAN-MARIE

But did that make the owner's money
any less good?

The wheat farmer looks at him. The point hits home.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

Do you know what 'catholic' means?
It means 'universal'. And that's
what I like about the church; it
has a place for the self-righteous,
the hypocrites, and the fools such
as myself. I bet there's even room
for an honest man like you.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The shepherd from before sheepishly brings his entire family
into Mass just as it begins. Jean-Marie sees them and smiles.

INT. CHURCH - AFTERNOON

Jean-Marie baptizes Geraldine's BABY. Mother and child look
well-fed.

EXT. ARS TOWN SQUARE - EVENING

The fiddler tucks his violin under his chin.

FIDDLER

Let's pick up the pace a little.

He strikes his bow across the strings. A baton hits a
washbasin in a pounding rhythm and a dance song kicks into
high gear. Couples whoop, holler and spin.

Jean-Marie gazes through his window to see the dancers right
beneath him, almost in the church yard. He shakes his head.

Looking past them he sees homeless CHILDREN, boys and girls,
huddling under the eaves of a large house. His eyes sadden.

He turns to direct laborers in constructing a SIDE CHAPEL.

EXT. ARS TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

The doctor sips wine and leans back on a bench as he holds court over a few men and quite a number of ladies.

DOCTOR

No, dancing is quite healthy. Good exercise for the body and mind. Didactic, medieval repression of natural pleasures, on the other hand, stresses both the heart and the head.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The Curé continues his sermon.

JEAN-MARIE

So what can we do, you ask? Turn back to God and rush to his mercy! There is no sin so wicked, no evil so great that he cannot forgive it. Your sins are a grain of sand compared to the mountain that is God's mercy.

INT. BAKERY - DAY

Mere Renard leans on the counter as the baker wraps some fresh French bread.

MERE RENARD

Sure, our good Curé gives his bread to those poor women. But you know nothing in this world is for free. Mark my words, he gets a warm oven to stick his baguette in, if you know what I mean.

She thrust the bread loaf meaningfully.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The side chapel is finished. It is dedicated to St. John the Baptist. The Curé paints an inscription over the lintel.

It reads: "His head was the price of a dance."

EXT. ARS TOWN SQUARE - DAY

The song comes to a rousing climax and the sweaty dancers lustily clap and cheer.

The fiddler hops down from his wash basin and wipes his brow amid applause from the crowd. The young woman he was with before in the hayloft approaches him. Her face looks gray and drawn despite the plumpness of her body.

FIDDLER
Ah, mon amour.

Grinning, he sweeps her into a kiss. She pushes him away.

YOUNG WOMAN
We need to talk.

He sees the seriousness of her face and his smile disappears.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

The young woman hugs herself. The fiddler paces and swears.

FIDDLER
You're sure?

She nods.

FIDDLER (CONT'D)
You're sure...it's mine?

YOUNG WOMAN
Antoine! You're the only one!

She burst into tears. He takes her into his arms.

FIDDLER
Shh...Don't worry. We'll think of something.

YOUNG WOMAN
W-well, you b-better hurry. My mama and pere already suspect.

FIDDLER
What? Merde. Look, go home.

YOUNG WOMAN
But-

FIDDLER
Go home. Meet me here tomorrow at the same time. I'll have a plan. Now go, before someone sees us.

He kisses her on the cheek, then steals off.

Leaving her crying in the shadows, shadows that slowly lengthen and swallow her. Soft crying in the darkness.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The young woman cries in the doctor's examining room.

YOUNG WOMAN

And that was the last I saw of him.
It was more than a week ago.

(sobbing)

Monsieur Doctor, what do I do? My
parents will find out any day.

DOCTOR

My dear, tell them. Would it really
be as bad as you think?

YOUNG WOMAN

No...it would be worse!

Her sobs become a flood.

DOCTOR

Well, I fear you must tell them.
Without a husband, this is too much
to handle on your own.

PIERRE MAYNARD (O.S.)

Of course you must tell them.

The young woman gasps and the doctor almost jumps out of his skin, as the tavern owner walks through the door.

DOCTOR

M. Maynard! What are you doing
here? This is a private
consultation.

PIERRE MAYNARD

I came to see you, good doctor, and
just happened to overhear your
troubles, my poor mademoiselle. But
what if there was a way to tell
your parents without them getting
angry - at least at you?

YOUNG WOMAN

O-oui, M-monsieur.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Tell them it is the Curé's.

YOUNG WOMAN

What?!

DOCTOR

Maynard, that is going too far!

YOUNG WOMAN

But it's not his.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Isn't it? If it wasn't for our "oh-so-holy" priest's sanctimonious condemnations of what comes natural to young men and women, might not your beau still be around, instead of driven away by fear from the Curé's hellfire preaching? If that is true, you wouldn't be alone in this situation now. Isn't the Curé of Ars really to blame for this mess? And if so, then how can they blame you? You fell into the sin, certainly, but that's not your fault. You simply trusted this good, holy man. All you need to say is...

INT. YOUNG WOMAN'S HOME - DAY

The pregnant girl stands before her mother and father.

YOUNG WOMAN

The Curé of Ars is my baby's father.

The parents look each other, astonished.

EXT. ARS - DAY

The rumor races through the town. The tavern, the fields, the knitting circles, the washer women.

INT. BAKERY - DAY

Mere Renard stands at the center of a small knot of townsfolk. Even the baker leans over the counter.

MERE RENARD

You see? What did I tell you?

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Catherine Lassagne and M. Mandy follow the Curé as he does repairs to the church.

CATHERINE

You must say something.

JEAN-MARIE

Of course, if they actually come and ask me, like you have, I will tell them it's not mine. Otherwise, what I will say are my prayers, for this girl and this situation.

(pause)

How desperate she must be if she is willing to tell this kind of lie.

M. MANDY

(exasperated)

She is not the only one who is desperate! How will you fix this?

EXT. PROVIDENCE - DAY

The Curé hands a sack of coins to a middle-aged MUSTACHED MAN who, in turn, unlocks the door of a HOME, a two-story fixer-upper. He hands the key to the priest.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The congregation, noticeably thinner, files out of church after Mass.

As the Lassagne family passes by, Jean-Marie greets them and addresses the father.

JEAN-MARIE

I am opening an orphanage for wayward girls.

They couldn't be more shocked if he wanted to open a brothel.

MONSIEUR LASSAGNE

At this time? You think that wise?

JEAN-MARIE

No, but I promised I would stop being afraid and start doing what God wants regardless of whether or not I thought it wise. So, I had a question for Catherine.

CATHERINE

Me? Do you want to know what I think people will say if you run a home for girls?

JEAN-MARIE

No, because I won't run it. I wanted to ask if you would do it?

Catherine's mouth hangs open, then she closes it.

CATHERINE

I...am surprised you think me worthy.

JEAN-MARIE

None of us is worthy of doing God's work. Me, least of all. We just need to say 'yes'. Do I have yours?

She lowers her gaze and nods.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

He stands at the pulpit, concluding his sermon.

JEAN-MARIE

God does not require of us extraordinary things. We simply ought to love what He loved on earth, and not care about those things which He regarded as of no consequence. One of our Lord's great loves is the poor. The Revolution has made many, many of them. You see these homeless and desperate everywhere, and they are in need, especially the children.

The parishioners grudgingly nod and agree.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

To that end I will open a home for orphan girls, those young daughters who have nowhere to go.

A gasp and murmuring runs through the congregation.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

But it will not be mine. It will be ours. It will be God's. It will be run by the good Mlle. Catherine Lassagne with some help.

INT. PROVIDENCE - DAY

The Curé leads Catherine and her friend and co-worker BENOITE LARDET, into the large, empty main room. Cobwebs and dust are the only inhabitants. The girls look at each other, then roll up their sleeves and tie handkerchief around their heads.

JEAN-MARIE (V.O.)

It will be called 'Providence', because it will be supported by God's good will and yours. I will pay for the building, but it will survive by the grace of God and the good will of this town.

The priest and the women scrub. The dust dissolves, revealing a home underneath.

EXT. ROAD - AFTERNOON

Two HOMELESS GIRLS hold out their hands to passers-by.

A HAND is held out to them. It belongs to the Curé of Ars.

INT. PROVIDENCE - EVENING

The Curé brings the girls into the clean home. They walk upstairs...

INT. PROVIDENCE, SECOND FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

...which is filled with beds. Catherine and Benoite welcome the girls with open arms.

CUT TO:

INT. PROVIDENCE - NIGHT

KNOCKING. Catherine opens the front door to find the Curé accompanying more girls.

INT. PROVIDENCE, SECOND FLOOR - NIGHT

Catherine tucks in the new girls. A quarter of the beds are filled.

KNOCKING comes from downstairs.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PROVIDENCE, SECOND FLOOR - NIGHT

Now ALL of the beds are full and even doubled up. Girls of all ages talk and bustle about in barely controlled chaos.

Catherine and Benoite have bags under their eyes and wayward strands of hair escape the handkerchiefs on their heads. Benoite breaks up a quarrel as Catherine stops a pillow fight.

MORE KNOCKING comes from downstairs. In a huff, Catherine storms downstairs.

INT. PROVIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Catherine opens the door to find the Curé.

JEAN-MARIE

Receive this child whom the good God sends to you.

CATHERINE

No. No, M. le Curé. There is no vacant bed.

The priest shifts his cloak revealing beneath it a TODDLER, filthy, dressed in rags, covered in cuts and bruises. Tear tracks cut through the dirt on the little girl's face.

JEAN-MARIE

There is always yours.

Almost against her will, Catherine reaches out and touches the child. She nods and takes the little girl in her arms.

EXT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - DAY

Pierre Maynard smokes a pipe. He stares through a cloud of smoke at the Providence in the distance. He notices the farmer, Fayot, walking by, hauling a sack of grain.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Oye, where you going with that, Fayot?

FAYOT

To the orphanage. I heard the Curé's got it nearly full.

PIERRE MAYNARD

You're going to go feed his harem?

FAYOT

Oh, come now, I hear most of the girls are little children.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Which makes it all the worse if you ask me. That's why he lives next to them. You know where he spends his nights. You can contribute to that sickness if you want. Not me.

Pierre walks into the bar. The farmer puts down his sack and stares at the distant orphanage. He scratches his head.

Pierre calls from the shadows of the doorway.

PIERRE MAYNARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You can come in for a drink and think about it if you like.

The farmer nods and carries his sack into the darkness.

EXT. PROVIDENCE - DAY

Supervised by Catherine and Benoite, the orphan girls play in the yard, help clean the outside, and tend the garden.

The Curé of Ars enters through the fence, bringing along another woman in her late twenties, JEANNE-MARIE CHANAY.

JEAN-MARIE

My dear, mesdemoiselles, you are doing a wonderful job overseeing these young lambs. But, S'il-vous-plaît, let me introduce to you Mlle. Chanay. She will help you with the house-keeping and cooking.

The women exchange greetings, but Catherine looks concerned.

CATHERINE

M. le Curé, I'm glad you mentioned cooking. With all of these hungry mouths, the larder is empty.

JEAN-MARIE

Don't worry. God provides. Come, let us see what donations we have.

INT. PRESBYTERY, STOREROOM - DAY

Light from the door spills into the room and frames...

Some pitiful small piles of grain.

The Curé, Catherine and Chanay look at the bleak picture.

CATHERINE

Now, may I worry?

EXT. PRESBYTERY, STOREROOM - DAY

Catherine helps Jean-Marie dump the tiny amount of grain into a sack held by Chanay.

JEAN-MARIE
Go and bake what you can with that.

CATHERINE
But how do we feed the rest of the children?

JEAN-MARIE
I'm going to go ask God that same question.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The Curé kneels before the Blessed Sacrament.

JEAN-MARIE
Lord you said, 'suffer the little children to come unto me.' Well, now, your little children suffer. Was I just being proud or foolish? Was the Providence not Your will? Please, tell me what to do. Our Father, who art in heaven...

INT. PROVIDENCE, KITCHEN - SAME

Chanay finishes grinding the grain and kneads the dough. She dumps the small mound of DOUGH into a kneading TROUGH, a long wooden container with a wooden cover. She closes the cover.

JEAN-MARIE (V.O.)
...thy kingdom come. Thy will be done...

She returns to the trough, opens it and removes HALF the dough. She kneads the dough she removed.

INT. CHURCH - SAME

The Curé is still on his knees.

JEAN-MARIE
On earth as it is in heaven.

INT. PROVIDENCE, KITCHEN - SAME

Chanay opens the kneading trough again and stops.

The dough in the trough is back to its original size.

Chanay stares at it a second...then shakes her head, takes out half, again, and closes the trough. She kneads the dough she removed, making a second loaf.

INT. CHURCH - SAME

The Curé stares at the tabernacle.

JEAN-MARIE
Give us this day our daily bread...

INT. PROVIDENCE, KITCHEN - SAME

Chanay opens the trough a third time. She gazes into it.

EXT. PROVIDENCE - DAY

Her SHOUT echoes down the street,

CHANAY (O.S.)
MONSIEUR LE CURÉ!!!

The scream startles a flock pigeons into flight.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

CHANAY (O.S.)
MONSIEUR LE CURÉ!!!

The Curé gives a start from his prayer. He crosses himself and runs outside.

INT. PROVIDENCE, KITCHEN - DAY

Chanay stands beside the kneading trough with the Curé, Catherine and Benoit beside her. The girls of Providence crowd the doorway trying to peak inside. Chanay opens the trough's lid.

It is FULL of rising dough.

JEAN-MARIE
Where did you get it?

CHANAY
It's what you gave me.

They all stare. Then, Chanay gives a loud GUFFAW.

CHANAY (CONT'D)
 And you said there wasn't enough.
 You were teasin' me.

She punches Catherine in the shoulder. She staggers.

CHANAY (CONT'D)
 He had me worried.

Scooping out another HUGE hand-full, she returns to kneading.

CATHERINE
 (whispering)
 M. le Curé, that's not possible, I
 saw what you gave-

JEAN-MARIE
 I know, I know.

CATHERINE
 So what do we do?

JEAN-MARIE
 We will eat it. And I am going to
 change my prayer.

He calls out to the girls and everyone. They flood inside.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
 Everyone, come. Come. Gather
 together. Let's pray.

They all do the sign of the cross. The Curé leads.

ALL
 Bless us, O Lord, for these Thy
 gifts that we are about to receive.
 From Thy bounty, through Christ,
 Our Lord. Amen.

EXT. PROVIDENCE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

The Curé stares at the kneading trough. Then he throws open
 the lid. Nothing is inside. He nods, then lowers the lid.

Then quickly opens it again. Still nothing.

He closes the lid then turns away.

Then spins around again and yanks up the lid as if trying to
 surprise the trough. Empty.

CATHERINE (O.S.)
 M. le Curé...

He drops the lid with a start. He turns to see Catherine looking at him.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
That...was a miracle wasn't it?

JEAN-MARIE
Yes, I believe it was.

CATHERINE
But unless, that happens every day,
it won't be enough.

JEAN-MARIE
(nodding)
God has bought us some time. I will
go see if the people of God will
pay the difference.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The Curé of Ars preaches to his small congregation.

JEAN-MARIE
The Lord said, "If you give to the
least of these little ones in need,
you give unto me." Well, today we
have little ones in need. Now, I
know what they say about me. But
this isn't about me, it's about
these little girls going hungry. So
please, be generous to the
Providence.

EXT. CHURCH - LATE MORNING

The congregation files out. As the Curé bids them adieu,
Mlle. des Garets and M. MANDY pull him aside.

MLLE. DES GARETS
You ask the impossible, M. le Curé.
It's not just your new infamy that
makes people not want to give.
There is a drought and crops have
been painfully small.

JEAN-MARIE
I come from a farm myself. I know
it's been a hard year. But do you
remember the story of the loaves
and fishes in the bible? Jesus
multiplied the loaves and fishes,
but first the little boy had to
give what he had. Christ called
people to be generous.

(MORE)

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

Maybe God wants to offer them that same challenge.

M. MANDY

Well, it may not be that people don't want to give, it's that they don't have anything to give. But I will stop by with what I have.

INT. PRESBYTERY, ATTIC - DAY

M. Mandy peers past Jean-Marie to a room barren except for a few stray grains of wheat.

M. MANDY

Mon ami, when you said your granary was 'low', you meant 'empty.'

JEAN-MARIE

I have prayed and God has provided. I must pray He will do so again.

M. MANDY

Maybe what He wants to provide you is some sound advice. This empty attic might be telling you something. M. Curé, is this really about God and the children? Or about you proving the people wrong and yourself right?

M. MANDY empties a small sack onto the attic floor creating a little pile of grain.

M. MANDY (CONT'D)

Bonjour, M. le Curé.

The mayor leaves the priest staring at the sparse room. His face is torn, could the mayor be right?

Jean-Marie gets down on his hands and knees and scoops every grain he can find into the pile left by M. MANDY. Then he takes out the RELIC OF ST. FRANCIS REGIS, gives it a kiss and places it in the little mound of wheat.

INT. PROVIDENCE - DAY

The Curé creeps inside, troubled, brows furrowed, hands clasping and unclasping. Catherine passes by with a basket of laundry. She immediately stops as she sees his face.

CATHERINE

M. le Curé, what's wrong?

JEAN-MARIE
This isn't all about me, is it? My
pride? My...

CATHERINE
...stubbornness?

JEAN-MARIE
Yes, thank you.
(sighing)
I mean, I've prayed and I've
prayed. I've read the gospel,
"suffer the little children to come
unto me." I...I'm an idiot.
Catherine, gather the children.

CATHERINE
M. le Curé. Are you well?

JEAN-MARIE
No, I'm a fool, and I'm sorry you
have been following one, but I'm
sure it has earned you time off
from purgatory. Now, go and fetch
the girls.

INT. PROVIDENCE - DAY

The children crowd around Jean-Marie, Catherine, and Benoitte.

JEAN-MARIE
My little ones, do you want to be
here, in the Providence?

GIRL #1
Oui, M. le Curé, I finally have
enough to eat.

GIRL #2
And I finally got a bed.

GIRL #3
O' course all you do is snore.

Everyone laughs, even the adults.

GIRL #3 (CONT'D)
I like it. We all do.

The children chorus their agreement.

JEAN-MARIE
That has been my problem. All this
time, I have been praying - I. When
really - it should have been you.
(MORE)

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
 I forgot that part of "suffer the
 children to come unto me."
 Certainly, God may hear the prayer
 of one poor, foolish priest. But...

He picks up one of the small girls and puts her on his lap.
 She cuddles into him.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
 When you children ask for
 something, how can He refuse? Let
 us pray, and if God wills we should
 stay, He will provide.

GIRL #1
 Should we do a rosary, M. le Curé?

JEAN-MARIE
 That sounds perfect.

They kneel, pull out their beads, and cross themselves.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PROVIDENCE - AFTERNOON

The girls, Catherine, Benoite and the Curé continue to pray.

ALL
 ...And lead us not into temptation
 but deliver us from evil, amen.

KNOCK, KNOCK at the door.

GIRL #3
 Merci, God is fast!

JEAN-MARIE
 Benoite, continue with the girls.
 Catherine, come with me, please.

The Curé and Catherine open the door to find a FOOTMAN
 carrying a small sack of grain.

FOOTMAN
 A donation from Mlle. des Garets.

JEAN-MARIE
 Merci beaucoup, Monsieur. This
 means so much to us.

Just then, the mayor returns carrying a little bag of wheat.

M. MANDY
 I scoured the town and this is all
 I could find.

JEAN-MARIE

At least we can eat today. Come.

INT. PRESBYTERY, ATTIC STAIRS - AFTERNOON

The Curé leads the little party to the stairs before the attic door. He notices a few GRAINS on the top step, coming from under the crack of the door.

JEAN-MARIE

Eh, I must be more careful. We can't afford to lose a single grain.

He opens the door of the attic.

And a FLOOD OF GRAIN pours out, running down the stairs, burying their ankles.

INT. PRESBYTERY, ATTIC - SAME

The room is full of grain up to the waist.

FOOTMAN

I thought you said you were out of grain.

(examining it)

That's strange, I've never seen this color before.

He reaches down and scoops up a handful. He picks the relic of St. Francis Regis out of the kernels he grabbed.

FOOTMAN (CONT'D)

This yours?

The priest takes it from him dumbly.

FOOTMAN (CONT'D)

So where did you get all this wheat?

The Curé opens his mouth...and passes out face first, a cloud of grain puffing up around him.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - EVENING

A crowd has gathered outside the priest's house.

FARMER

Where did he get it? Who has that much to spare?

FARMER #2

Forget where, how did he get it? I didn't see any carts, did you?

CITIZEN

No, and I couldn't have missed them. My house is just over there.

PIERRE MAYNARD (O.S.)

He snuck it in. That's the only explanation.

They turn to see the tavern keeper.

FARMER

Then how come there are no wheel tracks? That much grain would have taken a half dozen carts. Not a single track, and there hasn't been any rain. Explain that.

Pierre Maynard scowls.

PIERRE MAYNARD

You're a pack of gullible fools. That explains it.

Pierre Maynard makes his way into the crowd around the entrance, and the men begin talking again.

The cacophony of voices becomes the crackle of a wildfire catching alight as a CROWD gathers. All point to the presbytery. All say, "Did you hear? Did you hear?"

INT. BAKERY - EVENING

A man shows a handful of the grain to the baker and a small group of women including Mere Renard.

MERE RENARD

Are you telling me it's grain from heaven?

BAKER

Well, it's certainly not from around here. I've seen all the wheat from local farmers, and I don't recognize it.

MERE RENARD

Well, you can't believe everything you hear. What you're saying doesn't have any real proof.

WOMAN

Well, neither does your gossip.

That shuts her up.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Pierre Maynard glowers down at the Doctor as the physician peers through a microscope at a WHEAT GRAIN.

PIERRE MAYNARD
Are you saying this wheat isn't
from France?

DOCTOR
I'm saying it isn't even from
Europe. I have samples here from
all over the continent, and it
doesn't match any of them. See the
color? It's of a finer quality.

PIERRE MAYNARD
Well...well, that doesn't prove
anything. You don't have samples
from everywhere. I hear they're
growing wheat in Africa now.

DOCTOR
(snorts)
Africa? Didn't you say you watched
the rectory all day? And you didn't
see anyone coming or going? Then
are you trying to tell me that our
fool of a friar used invisible
carts to smuggle into a town too
small to be on a map, a half ton of
wheat - from Africa?

He picks up his coat and heads for the door.

PIERRE MAYNARD
Where are you going?

DOCTOR
To church. If I'm going to believe
that then I might as well start
believing in manna from heaven,
parted seas and people being raised
from the dead. I'm going to get to
the bottom of this.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - NIGHT

The doctor knocks at the door, and it opens just a crack. The mayor peers through, yelling from inside.

MAYOR MANDY

No. No more gawkers. The Curé is not well - oh, it is you M. le doctor! Thank goodness you are here. Come inside.

INT. PRESBYTERY - CONTINUOUS

The mayor ushers him into the simple room where Catherine wrings her hands.

MAYOR MANDY

I am glad someone had the sense to call you.

DOCTOR

No one called me. Is M. Vianney ill?

MAYOR MANDY

I think it may just be exhaustion, but he passed out after the miracle.

DOCTOR

Monsieur Mayor, do you really think-

MAYOR MANDY

(interrupting)

Yes, I really do, but you did not come here to discuss faith with me. Your patient awaits.

He waves the doctor upstairs.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The doctor finds Jean-Marie asleep on a thin bed. He wakes as the doctor enters.

JEAN-MARIE

Oh, Doctor. I'm sorry they called you. I'm fine, really.

DOCTOR

Let me be the judge of that. I will need to examine you.

He pulls out his stethoscope and starts to remove the priest's shirt. The Curé weakly and ineffectually tries to fend him off.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Please, M. le Curé - ouch!

The doctor yanks back his hand. His finger has been pricked.

Jean-Marie tries to rebutton his shirt. The doctor pushes aside his hands and opens the shirt completely.

The doctor sees on the Curé's emaciated frame a length of coarse rope encircling his waist, a thin chain pulls across his ribs and a strand of barbwire wraps around his chest. Each separate circle chafes, cuts and pierces his flesh.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Did you - did you do this to
yourself?

The priest does not answer.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Why?

JEAN-MARIE
I do penance for those who will not
do penance for themselves.

DOCTOR
Are you mad? This is why I hate
your religion, with its sick
obsession with pain and suffering!

The Curé chuckles and the doctor looks taken aback.

JEAN-MARIE
Strange words coming from a doctor.

DOCTOR
My profession is based on logic and
reason. I don't see how - this -
has anything to do with that.

JEAN-MARIE
Do you know why they call priests
Curés? We are supposed to be the
physicians of salvation. Literally,
the "cure" for what ails peoples'
souls. And is it not also true that
when one is ill, he must endure
suffering until he treats himself
properly and is made well?

DOCTOR
Oui, Monsieur.

JEAN-MARIE

The Gospel says, "by Jesus' wounds, we are healed." If by His suffering, we can be made well, then his priests, as his ordained, must do the same for those given to us, so they can be made well.

DOCTOR

So you're saying by beating your body, you are healing some farmer's illness?

JEAN-MARIE

No, his soul. You are a man of logic, oui, M. le Doctor? And, logically, a person who does something wrong should be punished, correct?

The doctor becomes very still.

DOCTOR

True.

JEAN-MARIE

St. Paul tells us, "I make up in my suffering what is lacking in the suffering of Christ." So I take on the punishment for the wrong done by those in my parish. I suffer, so that those God has given to me don't have to.

DOCTOR

Even still, I must insist you remove these devices of torture.

JEAN-MARIE

Don't worry. I will be fine. Did you not see the granary? God takes care of children and fools. With the orphanage and myself, we cover both. Go, M. Doctor. I just need a little rest.

The doctor shakes his head and leaves him.

INT. CHURCH - EARLY MORNING

Dressed in a white alb with a purple stole, the Curé walks to the confessional and stops.

The line is long.

INT. CHURCH, CONFESSIONAL - EARLY MORNING

The Confessional is a wide wooden box cut in two by a narrow partition. The priest sits on one side of the partition, and the penitent sits in the other. Jean-Marie takes his place and Fayot, the farmer who thought of donating before, sits in the other seat.

JEAN-MARIE

Peace be with you.

FAYOT

Peace be with ye, M. le Curé.

Awkward.

JEAN-MARIE

You may begin when you're ready.

FAYOT

Well, actually that is the thing. To be honest with ye, I didn't come to confess. I came to ask..well, I have to know...how did you do it?

JEAN-MARIE

Ah, that's why you came. And that would explain the line. Truthfully now, you're in confession, how many would you say came to ask that?

FAYOT

Most - or, maybe...all.

The priest nods.

FAYOT (CONT'D)

So, tell me, M. le Curé. How did you do it?

JEAN-MARIE

Honestly?
(lowering his voice
conspiratorially)
I didn't. God did.

FAYOT

M. le Curé...

JEAN-MARIE

It's the truth. Think. There's not that much spare grain in the district. Even if I found it, I can't sneeze without people gossiping about it, how could I sneak past them six carts of grain?

Fayot slams his hand down.

FAYOT
That's what I said! And it's not
like you're the sharpest nail in
the sack - meaning no offense, M.
le Curé.

JEAN-MARIE
(waving it off)
I've been called worse.

FAYOT
It makes not a bit of sense. Well,
I, for one, believe it's not a
trick.

He gets up to leave and the Curé clears his throat.

JEAN-MARIE
Monsieur Fayot, since you are here,
why not go to confession?

FAYOT
Oh, well...that. I'm a bit out of
practice. It's been some time, so-

JEAN-MARIE
Well, that's actually how you
begin. You start by telling me when
is the last time you went.

FAYOT
(chuckling)
Try thirty years - which is much
too much time to confess-

JEAN-MARIE
Actually...it has been longer.

Jean-Marie knows this but is surprised himself that he knows.

FAYOT
Ach, maybe thirty-one -

JEAN-MARIE
No...more than that
(searching)
...In the dry winter...when your
mother was ill.

Fayot stops, thinks and slowly sits down as memory comes.

FAYOT
Yes...yes, that was thirty-three
years ago. I remember...M. le Curé,
did you live in Ars back then?

JEAN-MARIE
The first time I laid eyes on Ars
was when I came as its priest.

Fayot freezes, staring at the face half-hidden by the grate.

FAYOT
Then, how...how did you know?

JEAN-MARIE
I-I don't know. I just...did.
Almost as if I remembered it.

Jean-Marie shakes his head, mystified himself.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Would it sound crazy if I said God
told me?

FAYOT
No - not so much anymore...Anything
else God has to tell you?

JEAN-MARIE
(smiling)
That you should go to confession.
Now that we have settled that, we
could begin.

Fayot leaps back into his seat.

FAYOT
Yes, well, uh, yes, um, I could
start with that comment I made
about you and the nails.

JEAN-MARIE
You could, you could.

The man begins his confession in earnest.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The confessional opens and Fayot steps out, wiping tears from
his eyes. The next man in line sees and approaches him.

FARMER
Fayot, are you well?

Fayot breaks into a wide, relieved smile.

FAYOT
Never been better.

FARMER
So what happened? How did he-?

FAYOT
 God listens to him. And he listens
 to God. Good luck.

He pats the man on the shoulder and shoves him toward the confessional. The farmer moves with trepidation into the booth as Fayot walks carefree past the long line.

EXT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - DAY

Fayot walks past the bar as Pierre Maynard stands at the entrance porch, smoking.

PIERRE MAYNARD
 Did you just come from the church?

FAYOT
 Aye, where I should have gone ages ago.

PIERRE MAYNARD
 Are you well? You don't look it.
 Come in, and I'll buy you a draught.

The barkeep walks into the tavern. From the darkness...

PIERRE MAYNARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 We'll get you back to your old self.

Fayot stares after him.

FAYOT
 No. I don't think I will.

He walks on.

Pierre Maynard comes out into the light, glaring after him.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The Curé enters again then he stops, staring. The line of penitents goes down the aisle and out the door.

The Curé sighs in frustration. He walks up to the line and address the crowd, which being at night, consists solely of women.

JEAN-MARIE
 Ladies, if you are here to ask me
 about the grain, all I can tell you
 is that it was not me -

A woman penitent interrupts him.

WOMAN PENITENT

It was God. We believe you.
Besides, M. le Curé, you got my
husband to go to confession for the
first time in thirty years. Now,
that's a miracle if I ever saw one.

The Curé smiles to himself and bows to the woman.

JEAN-MARIE

Then let us begin.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - NIGHT

A light snow falls as the young men huddle in the shadows.

Now, there are fewer of them and the ones that remain bicker
and shout.

FIDDLER

What are you? A bunch of scared
women?

DISSENTER

But what if we're wrong? What if
he does talk to God, and he's some
kind of saint or something?

FIDDLER

Fine then! Run off with your tail
between your legs! We can do just
as well without you.
(to the remaining group)
We can do this. We don't need them.
One...two...three...

ROWDY GROUP

Curé of Ars, kiss our arse! Leave
our town, you stupid clown!

FIDDLER

You're - you're a dung-crusted,
babbling fool.

All the boys laugh.

YOUNG MAN #2

You're a horny, old, puss-filled,
hypocrite.

"Ohs" and guffaws. They know that insult must have hurt.

MAN (O.C.)

You're a stupid, slack-jawed, gap-
toothed, back-woods moron.

"Whoa" goes up from the boys.

FIDDLER
(laughing)
That was a good one.

He turns to the insulter...

It's the Curé of Ars.

All of the youths' spin around to see Jean-Marie and their eyes go huge.

FIDDLER (CONT'D)
I - I - uh...

JEAN-MARIE
And don't forget arrogant, idiotic,
and sinful. Though 'babbling fool'
was rather spot on.
(leaning close to the
fiddler)
Also, your baby needs you.

The fiddler and the rowdy boys run like rabbits.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
What? We're done already?
(yelling after them)
Don't forget to come to Mass...and
Confession!

With a sad smile and a shake of the head, he trudges back to the presbytery.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - NIGHT

The priest peels off his outer garments, he is almost asleep on his feet. As white flakes drift down past the window, he staggers over to the bedside and kneels to pray.

JEAN-MARIE
Oh, God. You are a good God, such a
wonderful God. How you helped the
girls and the town...I can never
thank you enough. Let it never be
about me, but about you Mighty God.
Together, what can't we do.
Together, who can stop us?

Exhausted, Jean-Marie flops into bed.

Over his shoulder, in the farthest corner of the room lurks a SHADOW. It hulks like the shape of a man lying in wait.

Out of the shadow peer two glowing EYES.

The EYES watch as the Curé lays already asleep on his bed.

Slowly, we approach the bed. Slowly, we stalk up to Jean-Marie's slumbering form. A few more steps and we stare down at his helpless figure.

A monstrous, hideous HAND, black as night - with claws curved like HOOKS - reaches out and strokes the priest's face.

The Curé HEAVES himself bolt upright GASPING for air.

He looks around...There's nothing there.

Everything looks normal.

Jean-Marie steadies his breathing. Then wipes the sweat from his face and closes his eyes.

Then he hears VOICES YELLING from outside his window - a cacophony of cursing, swearing and screaming.

This time, there are more voices than before.

The Curé of Ars sits up again. In frustration, he throws off his blanket and tramps out of the room.

INT. PRESBYTERY - NIGHT

The Curé of Ars approaches the main entrance. Even coming through the door, the din of voices is almost deafening.

Yanking on his cassock, Jean-Marie throws open the door.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - SAME

There is no one there. And the yelling is gone.

Not a single person or sound. Nothing. No one.

There is not even one footprint in the freshly fallen snow.

Jean-Marie stands dumbfounded in the frame of the doorway. Then he hears it, faintly at first. One WHISPER, then another. Then a SHOUT, then many shouts and SCREAMS.

The Curé of Ars stares at the presbytery courtyard as it rings with a chorus of screaming BODILESS VOICES.

INT. PRESBYTERY - SAME

Jean-Marie slams the door and backpedals into the room. He grabs the crucifix off the fireplace mantle, and again the voices stop.

He stares uncertain in the sudden SILENCE.

He reaches for the front door, then stops himself. Instead, he walks upstairs.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Still clutching his crucifix, the Curé slides into his bed.

Swiftly sleep overtakes him.

In the furthest corner of the room, the pair of glowing EYES open once again - watching, waiting.

INT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - NIGHT

A mug CRACKS down on the counter top. Pierre Maynard glares at Mere Renard.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Have you gone mad? Are you trying to tell me he reads minds?

MERE RENARD

I don't know how he does it. I'm just repeating what people are saying all over town. He knows things that no one could know.

PIERRE MAYNARD

What? A magpie like you knows everything about everyone, true or not.

MERE RENARD

(squeaking)

I know! And these are things I haven't even guessed at. Things their wives or husbands or their own families didn't know or remember. What if he knows things about me? About me!?

The door SLAMMING open interrupts them. The fiddler who was leading the group insulting the Curé trudges in.

FIDDLER

He saw me. He saw all of us.

PIERRE MAYNARD

How could you be so careless? I thought you waited until he was going to bed or in his presbytery.

FIDDLER

Yes, and we went at our usual time. But instead, he came from the church. He must have been delayed with Confessions or something. He knows who I am now. I quit.

MERE RENARD

So do I. If he is telling all these things to other people...what might he say about me?

PIERRE MAYNARD

What has gotten into you? First the doctor, now you? If you quit now, we will never get rid of him.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Perhaps because you are going about it the wrong way.

The voice belongs to a small WOMAN in a lush, black dress. A black veil obscures her face. She sits at the end of the bar.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Do you know the surest way to kill a scorpion? Get it to sting itself. It is vulnerable to its own poison. Write the diocese, tell the bishop. The townsfolk might think him a saint, but the bishop doesn't know that. If the bishop receives a letter signed by multiple people, he can't ignore it. Tell him what kind of person you know your priest to be.

The woman lifts her veil just enough to sip her drink with black lips. Then she strides to the door.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I merely offer a suggestion.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Thank you, madame.
(as the woman leaves)
I'll get the paper and quill.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - CONTINUOUS

Jean-Marie walks with Catherine the short way to the church.

JEAN-MARIE

Last night I had the most disturbing dream.
(MORE)

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
 I will tell you after Mass...I'm
 sorry, I haven't even asked what
 brings you to the church.

Suddenly, the Curé stops.

A line of people extends out of the main doors of the church
 and far into the square of the town.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
 I will hazard a guess...

CATHERINE
 And they aren't all from here. I
 think the word is starting to
 spread.

JEAN-MARIE
 What word?

CATHERINE
 That there just might be a saint in
 Ars.

JEAN-MARIE
 Then tell them they have heard
 wrong. And tell them Confession
 will start after Mass.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Jean-Marie emerges from the confessional, cracks his back and
 looks to the penitents.

The line still stretches out the door.

The Curé turns to the line CHAPERONE.

JEAN-MARIE
 (groans)
 The line hasn't gotten any shorter?

CHAPERONE
 Actually, it's grown.

The priest sighs, turns and goes right back into the
 confessional.

INT. CONFESSIONAL - LATER

A VILLAGER tonelessly goes over his confession.

VILLAGER
 I cheated on my wife for six years.
 I don't think she ever found out.
 (MORE)

VILLAGER (CONT'D)

Then occasionally, I hit my oldest boy. He is slow in the head and tries my patience. I drink until I get drunk almost every weekend...

The "penitent" stops as the soft sound of CRYING comes from the other side of the grate.

VILLAGER (CONT'D)

M. le Curé. Are you crying? Why are you crying?

JEAN-MARIE

Because you don't cry enough. This is not a game. Nor is it a trick where you get out of hell for free. In confession, you must admit your sins, take responsibility for them. You must not only be truly sorry for hurting God and others but you determine to change your life. If you are sincere, then God forgives your sins and your soul is free, cleansed anew. If that is not in your heart, God knows, and you are wasting your time.

(pause)

So, would you like to try again?

The man looks into the Curé's eyes, and the priest's tears bring them to his own. Blinking hard, voice rough...

VILLAGER

Oui, M. le Curé. I can try.

JEAN-MARIE

That is all God asks. Now let's continue - from the heart.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

The line stretches out of the church.

As the light of day fades, the line shrinks one-by-one until the sun sets and the line is done.

With the dusk, Jean-Marie emerges, the last penitent gone.

He goes and kneels before the altar and looks up at the tabernacle.

JEAN-MARIE

Thank you - for a good day.

INT. PRESBYTERY, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Trudging inside, he pulls out a single boiled potato from the metal pot. He slices off a moldy spot and addresses the spud.

JEAN-MARIE
Hello, breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Jean-Marie eats it and walks up the stairs.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Curé drags himself onto the stiff bed.

Jean-Marie just manages to close the curtains, before rolling over into sleep.

A SILHOUETTE falls on the curtains and grows larger and larger as a dark figure approaches, and looms over the bed.

The darker shadow falls over Jean-Marie's face and he stirs.

The figure thrusts its arms forward and black CLAWS pierce the curtains and TEAR.

Jean-Marie bolts upright at the sound sweating and staring.

Nothing. No silhouette. The curtains are fine.

The Curé's breathing slows and exhaustion drives him back to his pillow.

His eyes are just about to close, when...

MALE VOICE
(shadowy whisper)
I will devour you...

Suddenly, out of every shadow pour rats - a swarm of glowing-eyed vermin over-run the bed clawing and biting as they come, enveloping the Curé.

The priest screams as he tears them off his body.

Then they are gone. The bed is empty. He is alone.

He leaps out of bed, breathing heavy. But there is no one there. Just him and the shadows.

One of the SHADOWS laughs, inhumanely low and guttural. The shadow grows. Then it becomes the CACKLE of an old hag, coarse and mocking. And the shadow grows even larger.

JEAN-MARIE
Who are you?

Then a GIGGLE. The giggle of a little child, except wicked, sick and maniacal.

Jean-Marie spins and grabs his crucifix...

And the giggling fades to nothing.

A KNOCK at the door. Jean-Marie nearly jumps out of his skin.

INT. PRESBYTERY, DOORWAY - NIGHT

The priest creeps to the door crucifix still in hand.

He flings the door open, cross thrust forward.

Catherine Lassagne jumps back with fright.

JEAN-MARIE
Oh, Catherine. It's you.

Realizing his stance, he tucks the crucifix behind his back.

CATHERINE
Oui, M. le Curé. Are you all right?
I was passing by and thought I
heard screaming.

JEAN-MARIE
Ah, screaming. Yes, well...I must
have had a bad dream.

CATHERINE
Maybe it was too many hours in the
confessional. You were there for
twelve hours today.

JEAN-MARIE
I was?...I was. That must be it.
Hearing all those sins, I think I
dreamed I was in hell.
(laughing weakly)
Sorry to have disturbed you. We
should probably both try to get
some sleep. Bonne nuit, Catherine.

CATHERINE
So you aren't still hearing
confessions? Good.

JEAN-MARIE
In the presbytery? No.

She turns to leave, and he starts to close the door. Then he swings it open again.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Wait, why do you ask?

CATHERINE
Oh, it's nothing. I - I thought I heard voices. At first, I thought I heard a man or a woman...but then I swore I heard a child.

The Curé's grip tightens on the crucifix until his knuckles go white.

JEAN-MARIE
You heard that?

She nods.

CATHERINE
What is the matter, M. le Curé?

JEAN-MARIE
I - I don't know.
(pause)
Catherine, do you believe in the devil? I mean a real, actual horns-and-pitchfork devil?

CATHERINE
With you, M. le Curé, I could believe in anything...but it could just be more pranks. Maybe they are pulling out the big guns, as they say, to get rid of you.

JEAN-MARIE
Hmm. Maybe you are right. And that gives me an idea. Good night, Mlle. Lassagne. May the angels and saints be with you.

He closes the door.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
And if she is wrong, Lord, please let them protect me.

INT. BLACKSMITH'S SHOP - DAY

The BLACKSMITH, a bulging, bearded man pounds out a horseshoe. He stands a full head taller than the Curé.

BLACKSMITH
Bonjour, M. le Curé. You look like hell, uh, er, I mean...

JEAN-MARIE
No, no, your words are probably
truer than you know.

BLACKSMITH
What do you mean?

JEAN-MARIE
Do you believe in hell, Monsieur?
In devils and angels?

BLACKSMITH
Well...I would have to say no, M.
Vianney. I am a simple man. I work
with my hands. I find it hard to
believe in what I can not see.

JEAN-MARIE
Perfect...well, at least for now.
Do you still own that gun of yours?

BLACKSMITH
Of course.

JEAN-MARIE
Très bien. Then, I have a favor to
ask of you.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM

The Curé gets ready for bed as the blacksmith sits down in a
chair by the window. He lays his rifle across his lap.

BLACKSMITH
So you are having trouble with
intruders. Do you know who they
are?

JEAN-MARIE
That is what I am hoping you will
tell me.

BLACKSMITH
Well, I have never been a bodyguard
before, but if someone tries to get
in, they'll have to deal with me.
Get some rest, and I'll keep an eye
out for anything unusual.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jean-Marie starts awake. He looks over to the corner of the
room and sees a large HULKING SHAPE. He reaches for his
crucifix, but the shape hears him and turns.

BLACKSMITH

Oh, M. le Curé, you're awake.

The priest breathes a sigh of relief.

JEAN-MARIE

Oui, Monsieur. I am. So, you have seen no one.

BLACKSMITH

Not a soul. Maybe, they heard I would be here and did not come. Or maybe, you know, you have had one too many fasts.

JEAN-MARIE

Oui, maybe.

He sags back and puts down the crucifix.

Then, there is a tiny TREMOR, which turns into a vibration. The crucifix begins to shimmy, then bounces across the bed as a low RUMBLE begins and builds into a deafening ROAR.

The crucifix falls off the bed. The Curé springs to his feet, but then the entire room BUCKS and ROLLS, and both men struggle to stand.

The sound of CRACKLING FLAMES, tortured SCREAMS, and NEIGHING horses echo above the violent shaking of the room as if a horse-drawn carriage from hell was riding through the room.

As the room roils and sways, Jean-Marie dives for the crucifix and SCREAMS A PRAYER. The tumult fades and stops.

He turns to the blacksmith. The man points the gun every-which-way. He shakes so badly he can barely hold the weapon.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

You heard that? You felt that?

The Curé ducks as the blacksmith swings the barrel, pointing it right at the priest's head. Jean-Marie puts his hand over the man's own, steadying it. He pushes the gun down as the blacksmith's eyes continue to dart wildly around the room.

BLACKSMITH

What in the hell was that?

JEAN-MARIE

I don't know, but I think you're right: hell is where it comes from.

The blacksmith gets a hold of himself and heads straight for the door.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

BLACKSMITH
Home. Now.

JEAN-MARIE
Will you stay with me again
tomorrow night?

The blacksmith turns in the open door.

BLACKSMITH
Not for all the emperor's gold.
Curé, I've had enough. Besides, I
don't think any gun on earth is
going to help you now.

Jean-Marie stares in desperation. Then, he nods.

The door closes on the priest, standing alone in the dark.

INT. PRESBYTERY - NIGHT

An old ETCHING of the DEVIL - wings, horns, claws and huge
malevolent eyes.

Jean-Marie reads the contents of the heavy old leather bound
book containing the drawing.

A KNOCKING at the door. Startling the Curé. Jean-Marie braces
himself, makes the sign of the cross, and then opens it.

He stops, seeing an elderly man dressed in a black cassock
with a tri-cornered hat and a sash. He is the VICAR OF
TREVOUX.

VICAR
M. Jean-Marie Baptiste Vianney,
Curé of Ars?

JEAN-MARIE
Oui, Monsieur?

VICAR
I am the Vicar of Trevoux sent by
His Excellency Bishop Devie. I am
sorry for troubling you so early in
the morning, but the journey was
very difficult, and I just arrived.
May I enter?

JEAN-MARIE
Ou-oui, Monsieur, I mean, M. le
Vicar. Please, come in. To what do
I owe the honor of this visit?

VICAR

M. Vianney, sadly, you are under investigation. We received a letter signed by multiple parishioners, denouncing your time here as Curé.

Jean-Marie hangs his head.

JEAN-MARIE

I knew it.

VICAR

You are not surprised?

JEAN-MARIE

No. It is true. I am a pathetic excuse for a priest. I am stupid, I forget my sermons half the time when I give them, and I seem to drive people away from God rather than bring them to Him.

VICAR

Being an incompetent pastor is one thing, but you are accused of drunkenness, attacking the townsfolks' businesses, and other priests have said you have lured away their parishioners. Most seriously, you are alleged to having fathered a child. There is even a fantastic charge that you claim to deal with the devil.

JEAN-MARIE

But, M. le Vicar, that is not my fault. Every time he comes, I tell him to leave and he returns anyway.

VICAR

What? Who?

JEAN-MARIE

The devil!

VICAR

You mean you wrestle with temptation?

JEAN-MARIE

No! I mean - yes. Of course I struggle with temptation, but I also struggle with the evil one himself, or maybe it's one of his minions. But when you say wrestle that is exactly what it is until I cast him out in the name of Jesus Christ--

VICAR
 (interrupting)
 M. Vianney, enough!

The vicar slams his hand down on the table.

VICAR (CONT'D)
 I can't believe what I hear coming
 out of your mouth. We live in an
 Age of Enlightenment. After the
 revolution, France embraces Reason!
 The Catholic Church holds onto her
 faithful by a fragile thread. I
 will not have that thread broken by
 raving lunacies. To speak of the
 devil as a symbol of bad thoughts
 or a metaphor of sickness and
 wicked deeds - fine.

Jean-Marie sees, behind the back of the Vicar, the CRUCIFIX
 on the wall slowly turn, until it hangs up-side down.

VICAR (CONT'D)
 But spewing ghost stories and tales
 of a black-winged boogie man with
 horns and a pitch fork?

The Curé's eyes go huge as, behind the Vicar's back, utensils
 and plates, and even a pitcher, lift off their shelves and
 float across the room.

VICAR (CONT'D)
 I tell you these are flights of
 fancy born of an over-worked
 imagination - M. Vianney, are you
 listening?!

The vicar again slams his palm on the table. Jean-Marie tears
 his eyes from the floating cookware to his seething superior.

JEAN-MARIE
 Oui, flights of fancy...over-worked
 imagination...Bien sûr.

VICAR
 Then what the devil are you staring
 at?

He turns around just as the implements land on the opposite
 walls and settle into their new places. All the vicar sees is
 the crucifix dangling upside-down.

VICAR (CONT'D)
 Why is Our Lord dangling by his
 feet?

JEAN-MARIE

It's the de...darndest thing. I just noticed it myself. Sometimes these things seem to have a mind of their own.

Jean-Marie grabs the crucifix and holds it tight.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

I'll fix it tomorrow. Come, let me show you to your room.

VICAR

So that we are clear, Curé Vianney. I will be observing you the next few weeks. If I am not satisfied, you may be removed from this parish and possibly - the priesthood. And if some of these more serious charges prove true, you may go to jail. Understood?

JEAN-MARIE

Oui, M. le Vicar. I understand.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Curé shows the vicar to his own room. The vicar looks inside, then turns to the Curé.

VICAR

This room looks lived in. Is this your room, M. Vianney?

JEAN-MARIE

At times, but this is yours to use.

VICAR

Where is your bed?

Off Jean-Marie's face.

FLASH TO:

INT. PRESBYTERY, CELLAR - NIGHT

The LOG on the bare floor of the moldy, dank cellar.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jean-Marie looks back to the Vicar.

JEAN-MARIE
Downstairs.

VICAR
Good, because I will not be fooled
by false humility or bribed by
special treatment.

JEAN-MARIE
I understand. Bonsoir, M. le Vicar.

VICAR
Bonsoir.

INT. PRESBYTERY - MORNING

The Vicar emerges rubbing his back and greets Jean-Marie.

VICAR
Bonjour, M. le Curé. That bed's stiff.
May I ask what's for breakfast?

JEAN-MARIE
Breakfast?

VICAR
Oui, the meal that starts the day.

Jean-Marie looks at him blankly.

VICAR (CONT'D)
Or were you trying to impress me by
pretending you work through it and
skip it entirely?

The Curé's look turns to terror.

JEAN-MARIE
Yes, breakfast. I'll check on that
now. It will be brought to the
kitchen if you would like to wait
there, s'il-vous-plaît.

The Curé turns tail and darts away.

INT. MADAME BOUCHARD HOME - MORNING

The plump woman pours tea from the stove and then moves with
her cup over to the table.

Just then the Curé bursts in.

JEAN-MARIE
Madame Bouchard! Oh thank, heavens!
I need some breakfast.

Madame Bouchard stares at him in blind shock. Her tea cup drops out of numb hands and SMASHES on the floor. Shakily, she sinks into her chair. Jean-Marie looks on, confused.

MADAME BOUCHARD

Oh, no. It's happening. Why are you asking me for food?

JEAN-MARIE

The Vicar General is here. He wants some breakfast.

The housekeeper lets out a huge sigh of relief and gets up.

MADAME BOUCHARD

Of course, of course. When you asked to eat, for a minute there, I thought hell had frozen over or the world was coming to an end.

JEAN-MARIE

I'm sorry for the late notice. I don't mean to put you out.

MADAME BOUCHARD

No, no. I've been waiting to make you a meal since you got here. It is supposed to be my job you know. Now go. I'll bring it to you in minute.

INT. PRESBYTERY, KITCHEN - MORNING

He and the vicar sit around the table which, for the first time ever, carries a full meal. The Vicar eats with gusto, but the Curé takes a bite and struggles to swallow. He twists in pain as his stomach struggles to digest food it has not seen in ages. The vicar notices.

VICAR

Are you all right, M. Vianney?

JEAN-MARIE

Oui, oui. I think I'm done.

VICAR

But you've hardly eaten anything.

Suddenly, Jean-Marie's intestines make a loud, odd sound.

JEAN-MARIE

No, I really couldn't eat another bite. Shall we start the day?

MONTAGE

IN CHURCH - The vicar watches like a hawk as Jean-Marie self-consciously stumbles through Mass.

VISITING THE SICK - The Curé prays over a sick child. Under the vicar's eye, Jean-Marie carefully does not actually touch the youth.

ON A FARM - Jean-Marie blesses a farmer's animals, as the family respectfully joins in prayer. The vicar, alone, holds his nose.

IN THE PROVIDENCE - Jean-Marie introduces the vicar with great reverence. The girls gather around the older priest as if he was the king of France, overwhelming him.

IN THE PRESBYTERY - The vicar curls his lip at a SIMPLE MEAL but eats as the Curé struggles with a mouthful. He flushes red as his stomach makes a SOUND LIKE A STRANGLED FROG.

IN A HOME - Jean-Marie anoints a sick woman. The vicar nods in approval.

IN THE CHURCH - The Curé prays fervently on his knees before the blessed sacrament. The vicar prays as well in a pew behind him.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Black outside. Now the vicar slumps in his pew. His head bobbing in weariness. Jean-Marie stays kneeling in deep prayer, still in the exact same position as before.

Suddenly, the Vicar's stomach grumbles, and he jerks awake.

VICAR

My goodness, what time is it!

Jean-Marie whips around, startled, having forgotten the vicar completely.

JEAN-MARIE

Oh, uh, I don't...I don't know.

VICAR

Don't know? Don't know!? When is dinner?

JEAN-MARIE

Dinner? Um...right now?

INT. PRESBYTERY - NIGHT

The vicar stares down at the world's most boring meal. Meat and a potato. Period. He stares with distaste at the food then at the Curé, who fidgets, unable to take the scrutiny.

JEAN-MARIE
Bon appetit.

He chokes down a bite with obvious effort. The vicar takes a taste. He can't stop from curling his lip.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Do you like it, M. le Vicar?

VICAR
Do you?

JEAN-MARIE
Yes, it's very...satisfying.

He takes another hearty bite, then his stomach audibly revolts, and he clutches the table.

The Vicar slams his hands down on the table causing the plates to rattle.

VICAR
Enough! No more of this charade. M. le Curé, do you think you are truly fooling me into believing this is your daily routine?

The Curé looks down, not meeting his gaze.

VICAR (CONT'D)
I will tell you many of your contemporaries have accused you of being simple minded. I give little credence to insults, but if you think you can make me believe this is really how you live your life, you truly are an imbecile. Now, you will show me how you conduct yourself in normal life, or I promise, I will drag you before a full inquisition.

The Curé of Ars raises his eyes, to meet the fiery gaze of his superior. He nods.

JEAN-MARIE
Good. It's for the best.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - LATER

The Curé sees the vicar to his room.

JEAN-MARIE
 Good night, M. le Vicar. I will
 wake you when I get up.

VICAR
 Yes, you do that M. Vianney.

He watches Jean-Marie with piercing eyes as the Curé departs.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK. The vicar opens the bedroom door to see the Curé of Ars looking tired but determinedly awake. The vicar looks exhausted.

JEAN-MARIE
 Bon jour, M. le Vicar. It is time
 for Mass.

VICAR
 Wh-the sun isn't even up yet.

JEAN-MARIE
 No. We have it early so the farmers
 can get to the fields by dawn. But
 you can go back sleep if you wish.

VICAR
 No. No. I will come.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Most of Ars and many from beyond attend Mass as the Curé kneels before the altar. The vicar kneels along with the rest of the congregation as Jean-Marie holds up the Eucharist.

Reverential SILENCE. But the silence goes on for a really long time. Finally, the vicar looks up to see the Curé.

He continues holding the consecrated host and tears stream down the Curé's face.

Finally, the younger priest lowers the Blessed Sacrament and resumes praying. The Mass continues.

INT. SACRISTY - MORNING

As Jean-Marie de-vests, the vicar's stare scours him.

VICAR

You took abnormally long during consecration. You threw off the entire Mass.

JEAN-MARIE

Did I?

VICAR

How could you not notice? What were you thinking?

JEAN-MARIE

That I was holding Jesus Christ. And if I should never be able to hold him again, I would never want to let go.

The words pierce the vicar's side and enter his heart.

VICAR

Here, let me help you.

He assists the Curé in putting away the robes.

INT. PRESBYTERY, CATHECHISM ROOM - DAY

A full house packed with children and adults. The vicar watches and listens.

JEAN-MARIE

All the prayers and sacrifices, all the good works of the saints, all the blood shed by every martyr, faith of the Virgin Mary, don't equal the power and grace of one good Mass.

CHILD

Why not? Church is just a bunch of people praying.

JEAN-MARIE

Ah, because everything else is the work of people, but Mass is the work of God. There, the Lord who made the universe and everything in it, sacrifices Himself for us. And in Mass, He is not some vague, pleasant idea, but really, truly, tangibly, personally present in the Eucharist. As the bible tells us, especially in John chapter six, it really is Jesus' body and blood. In Mass, He is so real we actually consume him.

The child and the vicar both nod in understanding.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - DAY

The Vicar watches the Curé waving to the departing people.

VICAR
Now where?

His stomach GRUMBLES. The Curé notices.

JEAN-MARIE
We eat.

VICAR
Finally.

INT. PRESBYTERY, KITCHEN - DAY

The Curé of Ars pulls out a pot of musty, boiled POTATOES. Where the potatoes are spoiling, brown spots rot their skin. Jean-Marie takes one out.

VICAR
How old are those?

JEAN-MARIE
I boiled them on Monday.

VICAR
That is almost a week ago. You're not seriously-

As the Vicar speaks, the Curé grabs a knife, slices off a brown spot, and takes a big bite out of the potato.

The vicar gags. The Curé notices.

JEAN-MARIE
(mouthful)
What?

VICAR
Nothing. You just managed to make me no longer hungry. I guess that is a miracle.

A KNOCK at the door. Jean-Marie opens it and the baker enters carrying loaves of bread.

BAKER
Here you are, M. le Curé. Oh, bonjour, M. le Vicar. This morning's leftovers, as usual.

As the baker takes his leave, the vicar snatches up a loaf.

VICAR
Thank the Lord, real food.

JEAN-MARIE
Ah...

The Vicar, not liking the sound of that "ah".

VICAR
What?

EXT. CHURCH YARD - DAY

The Vicar glares piercing swords at the Curé as they go to the back of the church. Then, he sees the WOMEN: patched and dirty clothes, some without even shoes, several with infants.

The Curé passes out the good bread to these poor mothers. They respond with "God Bless you's" and "Thank you's".

JEAN-MARIE
Thank the baker and the good vicar, here, as well. He comes from the bishop's office, and he gave of his very own breakfast.

The vicar rolls his eyes, until several women surround him.

POOR WOMAN #1
Merci, Your Excellency. Might we get a blessing as well, S'il-vous-plaît.

The man sees the dirty bowed heads before him.

VICAR
Of course, and on your little ones as well.

He makes the sign of the cross and lays his hands on every single one.

JEAN-MARIE
Now, I visit the sick.

EXT. ARS TOWN SQUARE - DAY

As the Curé and the vicar pass the square, clusters of visitors call out to the Curé, who acknowledges them and blesses them as requested.

A VOICE hails them from the tavern. It is Pierre Maynard.

PIERRE MAYNARD
A word with you, M. le Vicar.

VICAR
Certainly.
(to Jean-Marie)
Just a moment.

The Curé looks nervous as the Vicar approaches the barkeep.

VICAR (CONT'D)
What may I do for you, monsieur?

Pierre appraises the older priest.

PIERRE MAYNARD
I mean no offence, M. le Vicar, but
you look done in. May I offer you a
hot meal?

The vicar casts a guilty glance back at the Curé. To
Pierre...

VICAR
I'd love one.
(to Jean-Marie)
Go on ahead. We will meet later.

Not happy news for the priest of Ars, but he nods and
continues.

INT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - DAY

The vicar eats ravenously from a steaming plate.

VICAR
This is quite good.

PIERRE MAYNARD
Merci. Now that you are here, I
have someone to enjoy it. Business
has not been good.

VICAR
No? There are many visitors. I'm
surprised your place is not full.

PIERRE MAYNARD
Ah, but didn't you know? This is a
place of iniquity. At least
according to our good Curé. And for
that matter, so are dances, and
pretty much anywhere that has fun
to be found.

VICAR

Really?

PIERRE MAYNARD

But, it does not surprise me. If I did not eat or sleep, I might be angry, harsh to judge, feel attacked...

VICAR

Like by the devil.

PIERRE MAYNARD

Well now. Not for me to say. But if I was tired, starved, I might claim anything...I'll get you some more.

The vicar chews and the wheels behind his eyes spin.

Pierre walks away and grins.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - NIGHT

The sound of SHATTERING, SMASHING, and SCREAMS comes from the house.

INT. PRESBYTERY, CELLAR - NIGHT

The Vicar pounds on the Curé's door and the sound inside subsides. Finally, the Curé opens the door.

VICAR

What the devil was that racket?

JEAN-MARIE

You heard that, too? Then it wasn't my imagination...and I think you answered your own question.

VICAR

Are you claiming - is that a black eye?

The vicar pushes his way into the younger priest's room and turns the Curé's face to get a better view of the now swelling bruise.

Then the vicar sees the barren room. The log pillow.

He releases the Curé's face and judgment comes into his own.

VICAR (CONT'D)

The tavern keeper was right. Now, I understand.

JEAN-MARIE

You do?

VICAR

Curé of Ars, seeing you for the first time I was afraid that the accusations levelled against you were true. Now, I believe them to be largely false.

JEAN-MARIE

Oh, thank the good God.

VICAR

But there is something here just as serious, if not worse.

JEAN-MARIE

Yes, it's the grappin', the devil-

VICAR

No, it's you. You are doing this to yourself.

JEAN-MARIE

I am?

VICAR

You barely eat. You barely sleep. You torture yourself. Of course you are having hallucinations and seizures or fits, which is where you get the bruises. M. Vianney, you are either mentally ill or your fasting and mortifications make you that way.

JEAN-MARIE

But in the bible, Christ talks about the power of fasting-

VICAR

To a certain degree. But you are extreme. What would you do, take on the suffering of the whole parish?

The Curé gives a look that says, "I might if I could, but..."

VICAR (CONT'D)

No. Though I have seen you do much good, this is very serious, and I fear that you do not have the capacity to be a priest much less the Curé of a town. I will take a day or two more to complete my report, but that will be my recommendation to the bishop.

The Curé can only stand stunned, swaying from the verdict.

VICAR (CONT'D)

Furthermore, from this point forward, you are to sleep in a proper bed. I cannot believe I actually have to make that a command, but it's for your own good.

The Curé walks past the vicar toward the bedroom. Then stops.

JEAN-MARIE

Praise God. I always knew I wasn't worthy.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Curé sits in the darkness, staring. Then, he gets up and starts stuffing a small bag with his few possessions.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

With the bag beside him, Jean-Marie is on his knees before the tabernacle.

JEAN-MARIE

They have won. They have won. If they have turned the other priests against me...I have tried. I'm sorry. I will go away now and pray for the salvation of my poor soul.

Tears strangle his eyes as he turns from the altar. He flees.

EXT. ROAD OF ARS - DEAD OF NIGHT

Hefting only the small sack, Jean-Marie hurries down the road out of Ars.

By the edge of town, he stops to catch his breath, resting against a stone WELL. A crucifix affixed to the top looks down at him, but he does not notice as the night goes deathly still. He pushes off and continues down the road but stops,

As a RUMBLE of hooves and the JANGLE of metal approaches.

A black COACH pulled by black horses pulls out of the dark, moving into the small patch of light by the well.

A COACHMAN, also dressed entirely in black climbs down.

COACHMAN

Leaving Ars? Come, let me give you
a ride.

The dark coachman takes Jean-Marie's arm leading him into the midnight carriage. From the open coach, black metals steps extend down... so easy to climb.

At first, the Curé goes along. Then, he looks into the coach and the absolute DARKNESS within, completely without light.

He starts to struggle. The coachman pulls him on.

JEAN-MARIE

No.

COACHMAN

Come along. You said you wanted to
leave, to escape, to pray for your
own salvation. This is your chance.
Come with me, priest!

The coachman pushes him onto the stairs.

Hearing the title jolts Jean-Marie. He tears away from the dark figure.

JEAN-MARIE

You are right. I am a priest. I
want to go. I want to go. But I
can't.

COACHMAN

(sibilant, inviting)

Of course you can. It's only a few
small steps. Don't you want to?

JEAN-MARIE

Yes...NO! No. Not my will, but
God's will be done. And it is God's
will, that I am the Curé of Ars! At
least for now. And, who are you?

COACHMAN

Someone who can make it all stop.
The reports, the slander, the
attacks. Come with me, and it will
all end.

The Curé truly looks at the man in black and shakes his head.

JEAN-MARIE

Until the bishop tells me to leave,
I am the Curé of Ars.

The coachman stares at the priest. Sees the resolve.

The coachman's face falls into shadow. For an instant, his eyes flash RED. The same eyes that have stared at him from the darkest corner of the Curé's room.

He stalks toward the Curé.

COACHMAN

And who says I will let you return?

The Curé turns and flees. The coachman swoops after him, reaching for him. In the SHADOW he casts, his hands end in wicked claws shaped like HOOKS.

The Curé runs as fast as his tired bones will take him.

He will never make it. The town is too far away. There is no one in sight.

He makes it to the well. The claws reach for him to tear him -

Then he sees the metal crucifix fixed to the top of the well.

The priest's face changes. Hardens. The fear drains away.

Jean-Marie slows then stops and turns to face his attacker: The Grappin.

JEAN-MARIE

In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you-

And there is nothing. No coachman. No coach. No horses.

Gone. Without a trace. Without a sound.

The Curé casts around, bewildered. Then he looks up to the crucifix, to the suffering Christ, and he nods.

The Curé returns to Ars.

INT. PRESBYTERY, MAIN ROOM - DAY

The vicar enters carrying his luggage. He greets the Curé.

VICAR

How was your sleep?

JEAN-MARIE

I did not sleep much, but what I got was good.

VICAR

You see? Something as simple as a bed can make a lot of difference.

(MORE)

VICAR (CONT'D)

I'm sorry if my words last night were harsh, but they needed to be said. I will speak with a few more individuals to complete my report, then I will leave-

A woman's SCREAMS interrupt their conversation.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The two priests run up to the church steps to find the WOMAN FROM THE TAVERN who was wearing the black dress and veil. The veil has fallen aside revealing a crazed face, pale, almost bloodless. She shrieks and beats at the church doors so hard she splinters the wood. Blood runs from her knuckles. All the while, she screams CURSES against God and the church.

JEAN-MARIE

Mad'am, what is the matter?

She turns, sees him, and cackles. Her voice sounds like a serpent, dry and dead and full of venom.

TAVERN WOMAN

You are the matter, potato eater.
Why do you torment me?

JEAN-MARIE

Who are you?

SERPENT VOICE

Oh, I would have killed you already if it wasn't for that holy whore and that dragon, Michael, who protects you.

She points to the statue of St. Michael over the church door.

JEAN-MARIE

I said who are you!

TAVERN WOMAN

I am the boss, the chief, the leader of the damned! The hook that drags souls to hell!

Then, she BITES the corner of the church. She actually manages to mark the walls, but blood trickles from her torn lips and gums. Jean-Marie calls to the people around him.

JEAN-MARIE

Stop her! She is hurting herself!

He races up the steps and grabs her.

She fixes him with GLOWING EYES. The same eyes of the coachman. The Grappin's eyes. Infernal even in daylight.

WOMAN

Get away from me, black toad.

She PUSHES him away, hurling him through the air. He flies past the steps and lands in heap at the feet of the vicar.

He struggles to his feet as the vicar helps him.

JEAN-MARIE

She is possessed. It is the devil.

VICAR

How do you know?

Two BURLY MEN try to restrain the woman and she tosses them like rag dolls - just as the Curé had been thrown about so many nights in his bedroom.

JEAN-MARIE

Trust me, I know.

The Curé of Ars calls to the crowd as he runs to the woman.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

Every able man, help me!

(to the woman)

In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you!

WOMAN

I know Him. I fought against him in the war of heaven!

JEAN-MARIE

Oh, you know Jesus? Then let's go meet him.

(he prays)

St. Michael, the arch-angel, pray for us. Holy Virgin Mary Queen of Angels, pray for us. In the name of Jesus, come with me.

He grabs her shoulder with one hand while gripping a cross with the other. The woman falls to her knees. Four MEN grab hold of her, each taking a limb.

She fights them, but this time she can't break free as the Curé holds on to her.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

The doors burst open and they carry the woman down the aisle as she writhes and wails.

They reach the foot of the altar and then her body arches.

Her mouth and eyes clench shut, still an unearthly SCREAM tears forth from inside her.

SERPENT VOICE

If there were three of you my kingdom would have fallen!

A SHOCKWAVE blows out from the woman as SOMETHING UNSEEN, but massive, flies back down the aisle fleeing the altar and the tabernacle. The pews actually ripple, chairs overturn, and people get hurled aside as it explodes out the doors.

In the door of the church stands the vicar. He stares mouth agape. Naked astonishment and fear all over his face.

The woman's eyes open. A very human hazel. Panicked, she grips the Curé.

WOMAN

Am...am I safe? Am I free? Will it come back?

JEAN-MARIE

No, my child. It won't come back.

He strokes her hair, and she sags in relief.

The two priests' eyes meet.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

It seems my mental illness is catching.

Then, everybody talks at once. A cacophony of wonder, praise, fear and hope. The crowd surges toward the priest.

CROWD MAN

Curé, pray for me!

CROWD WOMAN

Curé, bless me!

JEAN-MARIE

No, my friends. Calm yourself, it is Jesus. Not me. How many times did he cast out demons in the bible? Yes, the devil and temptation are real, but God is stronger.

A MOTHER pushes through the crowd and places her SICK SON in front of the Curé. The boy has a WEN, a huge open sore, under his eye.

MOTHER

Please, M. le Curé, heal my son.

The Curé's heart goes out.

JEAN-MARIE
I cannot, madame.

He kneels down to the look past the oozing wound into the child's eyes.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
But, we will pray together for
Jesus to heal you.

The Curé makes the sign of the cross over the child, but the woman snatches his hand and places it on the child's wound. The wen instantly DISAPPEARS.

Dead silence.

Then the boy gives a SHOUT of delight and hugs his mother. The crowd goes crazy.

The Curé stares at his hands as if he has never seen them before.

Suddenly, a WAIL slices through the shouts of joy. Jean-Marie and the congregation turn to face this new demon. To find...

The girl who accused him of fathering her child, now crying.

GIRL #1
I am a liar! I am a liar! The Curé
isn't the father of my child. I
said it because I was afraid.

She throws herself at his feet.

GIRL #1 (CONT'D)
I am sinner. And you must be a
saint. Please don't let what
happened to that woman happen to
me. Can you ever forgive me?

JEAN-MARIE
Child, I am no saint. But from one
sinner to another... I forgive you.

EXT. ARS TOWN WELL - DAY

Women pull up buckets of water and gossip.

WASHER WOMAN
Did you hear?

EXT. FIELDS - DAY

A farmer leans on his hoe and speaks to a neighbor.

FARMER
I saw it with my own eyes.

INT. BAKERY - DAY

The baker babbles to his customers.

BAKER
Right in front of everyone. He
exorcised the devil. Then he healed
that boy's sore - poof! Gone! Ask
Mere Renard.

All eyes turn to Mere Renard who has remained meekly silent.

CUSTOMER #1
Come, Mere, tell us!

CUSTOMER #2
I can't believe you haven't said a
word.

Cornered by her friends and her conscience.

MERE RENARD
I...saw it. It was a miracle.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A horse drawn cart pulls into the square. Pierre Maynard
comes out to meet it.

PIERRE MAYNARD
May I help you good people. A mug of
ale to wash away the dust of the road?

CART DRIVER
No, merci. We are here to see the
wonder worker of Ars.

Pierre frowns. Then he looks to see a stream of TRAVELERS
coming into the town.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - DAY

The Curé of Ars finds himself accosted every two steps by the
faithful, the curious, the caustic, and the crazy alike.

Questions pelt him. "Please cure my arthritis!", "Could it have been a psychological event?", "How did you manage it, you charlatan?" and every question in between.

JEAN-MARIE
I'll pray for you...I don't
know...What? No!...

Finally, the Curé makes it to the presbytery: sanctuary.

INT. PRESBYTERY - DAY

The Curé meets Catherine as he catches his breath.

JEAN-MARIE
Please, tell them. I didn't do it.
It was God. They need to ask Him.

CATHERINE
They know God did it. But they know
God listens better when you ask
Him. Now, I'll handle the crowd.
You have a visitor. She says she
needs to see you urgently.

INT. PRESBYTERY, MAIN ROOM - DAY

The Curé enters to find a young noblewoman, PAULINE JARICOT (30s), seated by his hearth. She stands as he enters.

PAULINE JARICOT
Bonjour, Curé of Ars.

JEAN-MARIE
Bonjour, Mademoiselle. I understand
you need me urgently, but I will
tell you straight away I cannot do
miracles for you.

PAULINE JARICOT
Actually, M. le Curé, I believe,
I'm here to do one for you. My name
is Pauline Jaricot.

The Curé cocks his head, almost as if he is listening to something unseen.

JEAN-MARIE
Yes, you have started the Society
for the Propagation of the Faith.

This takes Pauline by surprise, but she recovers.

PAULINE JARICOT

Actually, I have told no one but a few close confidants that I want to start the Society...but I heard you could do that: know what can't be known. Well, I want to introduce you to someone you should know. A friend of mine, St. Philomena. She is a virgin and a martyr from the second century. Her remains were recently discovered in the new crypts outside of Rome. Now, there are over one-hundred cures attributed to her in the past year alone. And I think she wants to help you.

Pauline takes a small bundle wrapped in white and a painted PORTRAIT of a young teenage girl and hands them to the Curé.

JEAN-MARIE

Very well, tell me about her.

PAULINE JARICOT

She was a princess who dedicated herself to Jesus, promising virginity while very young. Then fought the godless ruling power of her time. She was ridiculed, defamed, beaten and even betrayed by her own.

JEAN-MARIE

(laughs)

Well, I think this little saint and I have quite a bit in common. Tell me more.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Jean-Marie celebrates the Mass with a packed congregation. He stands at the pulpit, preaching the homily, and what he talks about is Philomena.

JEAN-MARIE

She was offered untold wealth, if she denied her faith. She refused. She was promised a kingdom if she turned her back on Christ. She turned it down. She was tortured for not abandoning God, but she did not bend. She faced the wrath of an emperor, more powerful than Napoleon himself, and she did not falter.

(MORE)

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

Today, that wealth is gone, that kingdom has crumbled, and that emperor long dead, but one-thousand-six-hundred years later, we remember Philomena and honor her name. We venerate her as a hero and role model, for that is what a saint is, someone who shows us the way more clearly to Christ. For often, we tell ourselves we can't do what Christ did, he was also God.

A painting of Jesus with a halo looks down on the people.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

Or we can't be like Mary, we are not conceived without sin. But the saints...they are just people like you and I. Human. Broken. Full of faults. Yet, they struggled, and accepted the challenge every day to be like Jesus.

Statues of saints stand in various alcoves of the church.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

They show us that it is possible for every person - any person - to follow God's call. To become what He asked us in the bible to be, "a good and faithful servant". So go to Philomena, ask her, who was so faithful to God on earth, to help you now that she is in heaven. She will gain from God the help you need. In fact, I think that it was in honor of her coming here, that God worked the miracles He did. To that end, I will dedicate a new side chapel to her, in honor of God's saints, and place her relic there for veneration. Do not come to this poor priest. Go instead to Philomena, a real saint, to obtain all you ask from Jesus Christ.

INT. SACRISTY - AFTERNOON

The Mass has concluded and the Curé removes his robes. The vicar enters and examines him deeply.

VICAR

I have never seen before what I witnessed here. In fact, I'm not sure I believe what I saw was real.

(MORE)

VICAR (CONT'D)

God has never worked any miracles
for me.

JEAN-MARIE

You are a priest, you consecrate
bread and wine into the body and
blood of Christ. You work miracles
every day.

VICAR

And that. That modesty. You even
drew attention away from yourself
today and put it on that saint
what's-her-name. You want no credit
for yourself? Is that real
humility?

JEAN-MARIE

No, only honesty. M. le Vicar, know
this. If God could have found any
more unworthy person to work these
deeds, He would have. So you have
officially met the bottom of the
barrel.

They exit the sacristy and go into the church.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

The vicar follows Jean-Marie down the main aisle.

VICAR

Hm. Well, bottom of the barrel or
not, there is no way I can leave
with this new chaos. May I impress
upon your humility and hospitality
for awhile longer?

JEAN-MARIE

(smiling)

You are talking to the lowest of
the low, here. I'll take anybody.
Stay long enough and you can help
me consecrate the side chapel to
Philomena. I think it will go here.

He indicates an alcove beside the shrine of John the Baptist.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHURCH, ST. PHILOMENA CHAPEL - NIGHT

Now, the alcove has been transformed. It is built out and
looks like a true chapel but all is covered by drop cloths.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Curé sleeps peacefully.

Then, the SHADOW in the corner of the room grows and stretches. It takes the form of a man. Then, it grows wings and horns. And one clawed hand reaches for the priest.

As the shadow falls across him, Jean-Marie shifts, stirs, and starts awake.

He looks at the darkness that envelopes his room. In the center of the abyss, two glowing EYES - the GRAPPIN.

GRAPPIN

Black toad. Black toad. I told you
I would come. You did not listen.
You did not relent. Now you have
hell to pay.

Suddenly, ANOTHER PAIR OF EYES appears in the darkness. Then another and another. Until there is legion.

Jean-Marie faces a multitude of burning stares, flaming coals burning out of the shadow.

GRAPPIN (CONT'D)

Did you think that collar would
protect you?
(points to the cross)
Or that piece of wood could save
you?

A raspy OLD HAG's voice speaks out of the darkness.

OLD HAG

You pray to an empty box every day.
As if a god would hide in a
tabernacle, waiting to talk to an
insignificant little reptile like
you. If He was there why did He not
protect you as I came night after
night? Now, I tire of this game.

The Curé shakes his head trying to deny it, trying to overcome the fear.

GRAPPIN

I am the real power, and you will
bow to me.

An EVIL CHILD'S voice snakes out of the shadows.

EVIL CHILD (O.S.)

Or leave Ars. Flee to a dark hole
and never show your face again.

The devil shows the hooks on the end of his claws.

GRAPPIN

Or I will rend the flesh from your
body and incinerate you bones.

Shaking with terror, the Curé sinks to his knees.

Satan laughs.

GRAPPIN (CONT'D)

Yes, little toad. Do me homage.

JEAN-MARIE

I have preached. I have fought. I
have fasted. I even tried to run
away. And I'm tired. I'm done.

(shaking his head)

Because all I really needed to do
was to love and to believe, really
believe that God loved me. And He
does.

Jean-Marie struggles to look over at the wooden crucifix.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

And all I need to do is look to the
cross to remind me that Christ
loved us so much He was willing to
die for His people.

The Curé forces himself to meet the burning gaze of the
Grappin, and the priest's gaze burns back, fueled by defiance
inflamed by love.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

I am his priest. How can I do less?

He marks himself with the sign of the cross.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

I am His priest, and even if it
kills me, I will be the Curé of
Ars.

The eyes of the Grappin and his horde grow more
red...hot..murderous.

GRAPPIN

So be it.

Satan slashes his taloned hand across the priest's throat.

Only to have the hand SLICED OFF at wrist as a gleaming SWORD
blocks the blow.

The Grappin roars, clutching his mutilated wrist.

The horde retreats a step as a brilliant light shines forth from behind Jean-Marie and envelopes him.

Within it stands a beautiful WOMAN dressed as if clothed in the sun and her head is crowned with a halo of twelve brilliant stars.

To the left of the woman and beside the Curé, stands a lovely young girl only slightly less pretty than the woman. Her robes are both deep red and pure white. Flowers of light are braided into her hair.

To the right of the woman and on the other side of Jean-Marie, stands a MAN dressed in shining armor, massive wings of white feathers unfurl behind his back.

He wields the sword that severed the grappin's claws.

The Woman locks eyes with the Grappin.

Between them - Jean-Marie, the Curé of Ars.

She steps toward the devil.

Satan transforms into an enormous black horned SERPENT emitting a roaring HISS.

Behind the woman appears a multitude of the angelic warriors. They surge forward.

The devil ROARS and breathes forth a STREAM OF FIRE that strikes Jean-Marie.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - MORNING

Jean-Marie awakens with a scream, jerking upright.

Then a SMALL HAND reaches toward him.

The Curé looks up to see the little girl with flowers in her hair.

Jean-Marie takes her hand, and she leads him outside.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - CONTINUOUS

Jean-Marie steps through the door into early morning sun. He turns back to say thank you -

The girl is gone.

But he sees his bedroom ABLAZE, engulfed in flame!

SMOKE and FIRE billow out of the bedroom windows.

Having seen the fire, the Vicar, the doctor, and a number of other parishioners race to the presbytery.

VICAR
M. le Curé, what happened?

JEAN-MARIE
It's the Grappin. He was very angry with me last night. The canary had flown, so he burned the cage.

The Church bells RING the hour.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
It's time for Mass.

He hands his keys to the doctor.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Could you take care of this for me?
I don't want to be late for the parishioners.

He leaves his "rescuers" in wide mouth shock as he rushes over to the church. They recover, grab buckets, and race inside to fight the blaze.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - DAY

The Vicar, the doctor and other firefighters rush in, only to see the flames flicker and die.

They stare in shock.

VICAR
What just happened? Why didn't the ceiling catch fire?

The doctor pokes it and nods.

DOCTOR
It certainly is dry enough.

The older priest notices how only half of the room burned.

VICAR
And why did it die out here?

DOCTOR
It didn't just "die out", look.

The blackened section of the room ends as if the flames were stopped in a perfectly straight line...

Right below the small painting Pauline Jericot gave to Jean-Marie of...

ST. PHILOMENA, a lovely young girl with flowers in her hair.

VICAR

No fire burns that way. That's...
that's...

DOCTOR

Just not possible? Oui, I find
myself saying that a lot around our
good Curé.

He glances around the room. The fire completely died at the
image of the little saint.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Come, if we hurry, we can still
make Mass.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The doctor and the vicar enter during Jean-Marie's sermon.
The church is packed.

JEAN-MARIE

I know what you think. How I preach
hell and damnation. People love
their priest until he corrects in
them some fault. Suddenly, the Curé
is seen as worse than the devil.

People look at each other. Some ashamed, many offended. He is
calling them out.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

But how can I not? What good am I
if I say nothing, worried that I
may offend you? So stop sinning!

Many, many young people look up, caught.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

"So who can be saved?" you ask. We
all can, because God loves us. This
is the better way.

Everyone is listening.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

It is love. Love your God. How?
Simply do what He asks. Then, look
around you.

They obey and stare around the full church.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

Love them, too. Who? All of them.
Love your neighbor as yourself.

He comes down from the pulpit. The crowd is silent. Touched. Anger has melted out of many of the faces. Tears stain the cheeks of many more.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

You might say, "I can't do this. It's too hard." And you're right. It is too hard to do it - alone. Know that I am praying for you every day. But you: ask for help. Pray to God. Come to Him, especially at Mass or in adoration before the tabernacle where He waits, truly present, hidden for you. Also, ask the saints to pray for you. Go to Mary, to Joseph, and St. Philomena, whose shrine I will dedicate today. God will refuse nothing when you ask His friends to intercede for you.

INT. CHURCH, ST. PHILOMENA CHAPEL - DAY

The drop cloths are removed revealing a small picturesque altar above which hangs a crucifix. On one side stands a statue to St. Philomena, and on the altar is a RELIQUARY, a glass case, directly below Christ on the cross.

Jean-Marie intones prayers of blessing as the congregation prays with him. The vicar holds a bowl of holy water which Jean-Marie uses to sprinkle the small chapel.

JEAN-MARIE

St. Philomena. For love of Christ she lived for Him, she died for her faith in Him, now she lives with Him forever in heaven. By her prayers, may we attain that joy.

Jean-Marie moves to place the relic of St. Philomena given to him by Pauline Jaricot into the reliquary on the altar.

A commotion stops him, and he turns to see a MOTHER and FATHER, very poor, force their way through the crowd. Between them they push a wheelbarrow. Inside lays a CRIPPLED BOY, his legs are two withered sticks. The child barely clings to life and people back away from his deformity.

MOTHER

(weeping)

Please, M. le Curé. Heal my boy.

FATHER

We have heard you healed before...

VICAR

Please, you are interrupting the ceremony, this is not some...

Jean-Marie puts a hand on the vicar's arm and the older priest trails off.

JEAN-MARIE

You have heard wrong. I do not heal. God heals. Pray to Him and I will pray with you. And ask St. Philomena to pray for you, too. God will heal him if that is His will.

Then they pray. Everyone watches.

Jean-Marie touches the relic to the boy's legs. Silence.

Nothing happens. The buzz of disappointment.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

Keep praying, and trust in God. And St. Philomena.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

A crowd of people trails after Jean-Marie. The vicar sweeps into the swarm and shoos them all away.

VICAR

M. le Curé, what is going on here? I demand an explanation.

JEAN-MARIE

Ah...you are yelling at me?

VICAR

No - I mean - yes. But that's not the point. You don't eat, you don't sleep. You should be dead or at least stark raving mad. But if that is so, then maybe so am I.

JEAN-MARIE

And why is that?

VICAR

Because, I saw what I saw, and have heard what I have heard, but..

JEAN-MARIE

But?

VICAR

But how do you know? I mean really know. You say a woman is possessed but how do you know that she is not just mentally ill? You say the devil attacked you, but couldn't it just be fire from your bedside candle, and you, lucky to have escaped it? And then in church, you all but promise that poor couple a miracle. What if that doesn't happen? What if it's all in your head?

JEAN-MARIE

And what if it is? Have I preached any heresy? Acted against morals? Broken even one of my vows?

VICAR

No...No, but -

He pulls a letter from his cassock.

VICAR (CONT'D)

This is my report to the bishop. Before I deliver it, I must know - are you right or are you wrong about all of this?

JEAN-MARIE

Monsieur le Vicar, you hold my fate in your hands, but all I can tell you is what I told the devil. I am not afraid. Whatever happens, I trust it will be God's will.

A YELL comes from the church.

Then the crippled boy comes RUNNING out of the doors on PERFECTLY GOOD LEGS. A flood of people follow him.

The child sprints up to the Curé and throws his small arms around the priest, nearly knocking him to the ground.

He holds up a leg for Jean-Marie to see.

CRIPPLED BOY

Look, Curé! Look at my new legs!

And look the priest does. His smile matches the boy's.

JEAN-MARIE

They are wonderful.

CRIPPLED BOY

Thank you! Thank you, Curé!

JEAN-MARIE
 No, thank God. Quick go to the
 tabernacle and thank Him. On your
 way, thank St. Philomena as well.

The little boy darts through the people to the church.

CRIPPLED BOY
 Thank youuu Goodd!

The boy's parents just make their way outside, when the boy
 runs past them back into the building and they follow him.

The vicar stares after him.

VICAR
 I don't believe it.

JEAN-MARIE
 And that is the curse of our age.
 The only thing that stops God from
 working the miracles He did in the
 time of Moses is our lack of faith.

The vicar looks at him as if snapping out of a daze.

Then he takes his letter and tears it into pieces. He turns
 and HUGS the Curé. Jean-Marie is so shocked it takes him a
 moment to respond.

VICAR
 I think my visit here is done.

He walks into the presbytery. Jean-Marie looks to heaven.

JEAN-MARIE
 And the miracles never cease.

INT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - DAY

Pierre Maynard stares at his empty tavern. He pulls a STRONG
 BOX from beneath the bar and opens it.

A few notes and some coin, almost as empty as his bar.

SHOUTING and CHEERING snap him out of his worry.

EXT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Pierre steps outside to see a throng of people celebrating
 around the church as the poor mother and father hold their
 boy aloft. The youth kicks his perfect legs in excitement.

Then, Pierre spots the vicar. The older priest wears his traveling hat and carries his walking stick and a bag of luggage. Pierre runs over to him.

PIERRE MAYNARD

M. le Vicar, what's going on here?

VICAR

I think a modern miracle. I'll inform the bishop to send someone to document it.

PIERRE MAYNARD

What are you talking about? You're not leaving are you?

VICAR

Yes, my time here is done. I leave Ars a little thinner and sleepier than when I came, but I think I'm a bit holier and happier, too.

PIERRE MAYNARD

But, the troubles with the Curé?

VICAR

The Bishop will send his decision soon.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The BISHOP of Belley dressed in a purple zucchetto, or skull cap, and purple vestments addresses the congregation as the Curé sits in the side pews reserved for priests.

BISHOP

Regarding the accusations made against the moral conduct of the Curé of Ars, we find no evidence to support such claims. Regarding his inability to perform priestly duties, we find no claim.

Jean-Marie sighs in relief. The parishioners nod in approval.

BISHOP (CONT'D)

Finally, for the claims that M. Vianney is mad, my response is if that is true, I wish all my priests had a touch of the same madness.

The assembly bursts into applause. Among the parishioners sit the initial seven who called for the Curé's expulsion, including the doctor and Mere Renard.

The one exception is Pierre Maynard who stands at the entrance of the church shaking his head.

INT. SACRISTY - DAY

The Curé divests of his Mass robes.

PIERRE MAYNARD (O.S.)
You did it.

Jean-Marie turns to see Pierre in the doorway.

PIERRE MAYNARD (CONT'D)
I don't know how, but you managed
to fool them all. Whatever you said
about the tavern, no one comes. I'm
broke, and I'll probably have to
leave Ars. Enjoy it. You won.

The tavern owner jams his cap back on his head and leaves.

INT. HORSE & CART TAVERN - DAY

Pierre Maynard takes the last few sous (coins) out of the strong box. It is completely empty.

And sees the Curé standing in the doorway.

Jean-Marie walks in carrying another wooden chest. He places it on the bar. It reads POOR BOX.

The priest opens it. The chest is overflowing.

Without a word, Jean-Marie dumps the money from the Poor Box into Pierre Maynard's strong box.

PIERRE MAYNARD
What are you doing?

JEAN-MARIE
You are broke, no? Then this
belongs to you as much as anyone.

PIERRE MAYNARD
How long will this last me when I
have no customers? You saw to that.

JEAN-MARIE
Then close the tavern. Open an inn.

He gestures to the non-stop flow of people outside the door.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
I think you will have no shortage
of guests.

Then the priest shuts the box and walks away. Before he can reach the door...

PIERRE MAYNARD

Why are you doing this? I was...

JEAN-MARIE

Your enemy?...You were never mine.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

The Curé makes it through the pressing pilgrims, toward the front of a huge line which starts at his confessional.

Jean-Marie places a purple stole around his shoulders, then nods to the first MAN in line.

JEAN-MARIE

Shall we begin?

He enters the small booth. The first penitent of the multitude follows.

INT. CONFESSIONAL - CONTINUOUS

Jean-Marie sits on one side of the wooden lattice work.

JEAN-MARIE

Peace be with you.

MAN

M. le Curé, it has been ten years since my last-

JEAN-MARIE

Ah, perhaps a bit more.

MAN

...Yes, actually, thirteen.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

As the man in the confessional continues, the line stretches out the doors.

ARS TRANSFORMED

-- The line continues deep into the town. As it moves forward, more people join it. Endless.

-- In the town square, people no longer dance or drink. Instead they gather in groups to talk, to laugh, to help the pilgrims, to tend the sick and to pray the rosary.

-- In the doorway of the Horse & Cart Tavern, Pierre Maynard stands beneath a new sign that reads "HORSE & CART INN". He welcomes a group of PILGRIMS who enter with their baggage.

-- In a family home, a man who previously drank at the bars, sits with his family around a meal at the table as he leads them in saying grace.

-- The Church bell rings out.

-- In the fields, A farmer stops his plow, wipes the sweat from his brow, crosses himself, and bows his head to pray the Angelus.

INT. CONFESSIONAL - LATER

As the church bell continues to BONG out the hour, a new penitent, a WOMAN, sits in the booth owning her sins.

On the other side sits Jean-Marie, now AN OLD MAN.

JEAN-MARIE

And go in peace. Now tell the next person to wait. It's time for Mass.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The Curé laboriously climbs up to the pulpit. He gazes upon the congregation and his eyes alight upon the priests and bishops among the crowd.

JEAN-MARIE

People say I do great things. They are wrong. As a man, I am nothing. But priests...You would weep with joy and love if you knew what truly your priests have done for you.

The overflowing church looks to the clergy.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)

If we don't have the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have Our Lord. Who is it that places Him there in the tabernacle? It is the priest. Who is it that receives our soul when it enters into life? It is the priest. Who gives the soul the nourishment to provide it with the power to make its pilgrimage in life? It is the priest. And if this soul comes to die through sin, who will revive it and bring it back to the calmness of peace? Again, the priest. Who prepares the soul to appear before God, cleansing this soul for the last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest.

(MORE)

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
 Oh the priest is something so
 great! The priesthood - it is the
 love of the heart of Jesus.

Tears stain many eyes of lay and clergy alike.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
 Come forward my brethren and let us
 bless God's people.

The priests and bishops come out of the pews and the entire
 multitude kneels before their outstretched hands.

INT. PRESBYTERY - EVENING

The Curé barely makes it through his door and slams it behind
 him, escaping the mob. He checks the bits of cloth cut or
 torn from his cassock.

JEAN-MARIE
 Bah.

Exhausted he mounts the stairs.

EXT. PRESBYTERY - EVENING

A young priest, the ABBE TOCCANIER (30s) manages to get
 through the crowd and opens the door with his key.

Then he GASPS and rushes inside.

INT. PRESBYTERY - CONTINUOUS

At the base of the stairs, the Curé lays crumpled and
 bleeding from a gash on his head.

INT. PRESBYTERY, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Well-wishers crowd the room, peer in the doorway, and choke
 the hall. Among them are Mere Renard and Pierre Maynard.

The doctor examines Jean-Marie who looks like death. The
 physician looks up and shakes his head.

The crowd ripples with denials and sobs. Mere Renard bursts
 into tears.

DOCTOR
 Everybody out. He needs rest.

JEAN-MARIE (O.C.)
 I need Last Rites.

Everyone turns, shocked to see him awake.

ABBE TOCCANIER
I will bring the Sacraments, and
you will recover.

JEAN-MARIE
Not this time, I'm afraid. But,
please, bring them.

The younger priest ushers everyone out as he leaves.

The priest eye's begin to sink shut. Then snap open. In the doorway stands a WOMAN in an elegant, dark dress.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
I thought everyone had left. May I
help you, my child?

The woman steps forward. Her eyes GLOW like flaming coals.

He stares into those burning embers...then chuckles.

JEAN-MARIE (CONT'D)
Even now, you come to fight me? You
might be too late.

WOMAN
No, I've come to make sure you are
really dying. You torment me so.

JEAN-MARIE
Not sorry to see me go?

The devil, the ancient serpent, stares at him. Weak.

WOMAN
If there were three of you, my
kingdom would have fallen.

The woman gives a little bow, then walks out of the room and vanishes in the shadow.

At that moment, Abbe Toccanier enters from the direction the woman left. He carries the Eucharist and oil for Last Rites.

ABBE TOCCANIER
Was someone in here? I heard talking.

JEAN-MARIE
Just an old acquaintance.

ABBE TOCCANIER
Oh. I didn't see them leave. Are
you ready?

Jean-Marie nods but tears roll down his face.

ABBE TOCCANIER (CONT'D)
Why are you crying?

JEAN-MARIE
It is sad to receive Communion for
the last time. But God is so good.
When you can no longer come to Him.
He comes to you. Thank you for
bringing Him.

Abbe Toccanier intones a prayer in Latin. He holds the Holy Eucharist aloft and places it on the Curé's tongue.

A huge, peaceful smile breaks through the old Curé's face. He closes his eyes and lays back in his bed.

In the soft light of the fire, Jean-Marie's old HANDS, folded in prayer, clasp a rosary. A young man's rough HANDS PIERCED AS IF BY NAILS fold over Jean-Marie's.

MAN (O.S.)
Come, good and faithful servant.
You have done well.

INSERT TITLE ON BLACK: Jean-Marie Baptiste Vianney, the Curé of Ars, died August 4th, 1859. He was the pastor of 273 people in Ars. By the time of his death, 100,000 pilgrims a year came to see him.

FOOTAGE of Jean-Marie's Church as it is today, massive and beautiful. Inside, the little Chapel of St. Philomena. TITLE: "The Cure of Ars Church today. St. Philomena's Chapel in Ars filled with the crutches, stretchers and braces left behind by the people healed by her and the Curé's prayers."

INSERT TITLE ON BLACK: On May 31, 1925 the Curé of Ars was declared a Saint and named the Patron of Parish Priests.

FOOTAGE and TITLE: the dough trough where the bread multiplied.

FOOTAGE and TITLE: the Curé's bed burned by the devil.

INSERT TITLE ON BLACK: "In the year 2009, the man who was almost denied the priesthood was named Patron Saint of All Priests. More than 150 years after his death, the Curé's body still lies in Ars today. Incorrupt, without explanation, for all to see."

FOOTAGE of Jean-Marie's body resting peacefully above the altar in Ars.

INSERT TITLE: "Pray for us, Curé of Ars."

FADE OUT.