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# **BLESS ME, FATHER**

**A Play in Two Acts**

**by**

**CRAIG ALPAUGH**



**Dramatic Publishing**

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BLESS ME, FATHER was first presented by the University of Arizona, Lyceum Series, at the Park Theatre, Tucson, Az. The setting was by Dan Francis. Director of the play was Tony DeBruno. The play opened with the following cast:

FATHER RICHARD .....	<i>Michael Maggio</i>
FATHER CHARLES .....	<i>Howard Allen</i>
SISTER MARIA .....	<i>Jackie Spinella</i>
TOMMY .....	<i>Rusty Agte</i>
MRS. PROUT .....	<i>Alice Schwartz</i>
SUSAN .....	<i>Celia Lee</i>
MRS. MURPHY .....	<i>Janice St. John</i>
BISHOP BUNGY .....	<i>Larry Ford</i>
OFFICER STROMER .....	<i>Ned Carnes</i>
IRA .....	<i>Chris Gregson</i>
MR. PROUT .....	<i>Rich Lemin</i>

# BLESS ME, FATHER

A Play in Two Acts  
For 7 Men and 4 Women

## CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

FATHER RICHARD . . . . . new to the priesthood, 20s  
FATHER CHARLES . . . . . 40 years old  
SISTER MARIA . . . . . a disapproving woman  
TOMMY . . . . . mischievous, about 12  
MRS. PROUT . . . . . late 20s  
SUSAN . . . . . Father Richard's sister, early 20s  
MRS. MURPHY . . . . . the housekeeper, 40s  
BISHOP BUNGY . . . . . 60s  
OFFICER STROMER . . . . . about 30  
IRA . . . . . Susan's fiancé, late 20s  
MR. PROUT . . . . . late 20s

TIME: Present.

PLACE: Holy Family Rectory.



## ACT ONE

SCENE: *A modern, well-furnished rectory. [See Production Notes for set.]*

AT RISE: *FATHER RICHARD and FATHER CHARLES are sitting on the sofa, watching a football game on television.*

ANNOUNCER. It's fourth and goal for the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame. Only eight seconds left in the ball game. The Southern California Trojans lead 21 to 17. A field goal can't win for Notre Dame. It's gonna take a miracle, folks! The Irish have called time out. While there's a break in the action a word from our sponsor. "Do you suffer from athletes' foot?"

FATHER RICHARD. Turn it down during the commercial. (*FATHER CHARLES turns down the sound. FATHER RICHARD crosses to the desk and picks up a can of nuts.*)

FATHER CHARLES (*clutching one of the pillows on the sofa*). I don't know if I can stand the pressure.

FATHER RICHARD. I thought you were going into cardiac arrest when they scored that last touchdown.

FATHER CHARLES. You didn't have to jump on me.

FATHER RICHARD. I got a little carried away.

FATHER CHARLES. After all, it's only a game.

FATHER RICHARD. Only a game! Our honor is at stake.  
We can't let these heathens beat us!

FATHER CHARLES. Will you stop calling them heathens!

FATHER RICHARD. You're right—we can't let these pagans beat us!

FATHER CHARLES. I'm as big a Notre Dame fan as anyone in the country. You don't see me resorting to name calling.

FATHER RICHARD. Come on. You know I don't mean it. I just get overenthusiastic.

FATHER CHARLES. Shhh. It's starting. *(He turns the sound back up. FATHER RICHARD rushes to the sofa.)*

ANNOUNCER. Notre Dame's breaking out of the huddle. They'll have Brotonski at flanker and Poloski at wide receiver. Witkiewitz will be at fullback. The coach just sent in a new quarterback.

FATHER CHARLES & FATHER RICHARD *(together)*.  
Oh, no. A new quarterback?

ANNOUNCER. We'll check his number for you...#18—Herbie Feldman.

FATHER CHARLES & FATHER RICHARD *(together)*.  
Herbie Feldman?

ANNOUNCER. That's right, folks—Herbie Feldman! They're in an "I" formation... Feldman's calling the signals...he's dropping back to pass. He's being rushed, he's throwing deep in the end zone to Poloski. He's got it! He's got it! Touchdown! Touchdown! With eight seconds left Notre Dame has pulled the game out.

FATHER RICHARD *(completely ecstatic)*. He got it. He got it. *(He grabs a pillow off the sofa and beats FATHER CHARLES with it.)* We won! *(The Notre Dame fight song comes on. FATHER RICHARD, in his joy,*

*dances like a pom pom girl, as he sings the fight song. FATHER CHARLES jumps up and he and FATHER RICHARD are dancing arm in arm as they sing. FATHER CHARLES, exhausted, returns to the sofa, sits, and turns off the television.)*

FATHER CHARLES. Bless their souls, I hope they all get drafted by the New Orleans Saints!

FATHER RICHARD. The Fighting Irish have done it again. Did you see that pass? Incredible—simply incredible! I'll be back in a second. *(He exits UC through the main door. FATHER CHARLES straightens up the sofa.)*

*(After a few beats, FATHER RICHARD returns, crosses to the table UR and grabs the football.)*

FATHER RICHARD. Come on, there's about twenty kids out in the parking lot playing football.

FATHER CHARLES. You go ahead.

FATHER RICHARD. You don't want to play?

FATHER CHARLES. I had enough last week. I was foolish to let you talk me into playing with those kids. I couldn't walk for two days.

FATHER RICHARD. It's good for you—keeps you in shape.

FATHER CHARLES *(stern)*. I said no!

FATHER RICHARD *(laughing)*. Getting too old, huh?

FATHER CHARLES. No, I'm not getting too old.

FATHER RICHARD *(crosses to FATHER CHARLES, pretending to be very old)*. When you're over the hill, I suppose it's hard to admit.

FATHER CHARLES. There is nothing to admit. You may have fifteen years on me, but I can keep up with you in any sport.

FATHER RICHARD. If you won't go outside—we'll settle it right here—one-on-one!

FATHER CHARLES. Don't be silly.

FATHER RICHARD. Come on—one play.

FATHER CHARLES. Are you deaf? The answer is no!

FATHER RICHARD. You old guys talk a good game, but you're all washed up.

FATHER CHARLES (*last straw*). Have it your way. Just remember you wouldn't take no for an answer. I'll have to show you the hard way. (*FATHER RICHARD crosses DC and places the ball down. FATHER CHARLES rises and crosses to the ball. FATHER RICHARD pretends to be quieting an imaginary crowd by holding his hands up.*) Just hike the ball.

FATHER RICHARD (*pretends to be taking a snap from center*). Signals: 38-24-17 Hut, hut, hut! (*On the third "hut" he takes the snap and dashes R with FATHER CHARLES in pursuit.*) Stoddard's got the ball. (*Running around the desk.*) The blitz is on. (*Crossing DR.*) He'll have to scramble. (*He dashes across the stage with FATHER CHARLES after him.*) Touchdown! (*FATHER CHARLES crosses DC. FATHER RICHARD goes to him.*) That Stoddard—what an ace!

FATHER CHARLES. Yeah, yeah ...

FATHER RICHARD (*slapping him on the back*). How you feeling, old-timer? (*This makes FATHER CHARLES angry. FATHER RICHARD turns away laughing. No sooner has FATHER RICHARD turned his back than FATHER CHARLES pounces on him.*)

FATHER CHARLES. Old-timer, huh? (*Grabs the ball from FATHER RICHARD.*) I got it.

FATHER RICHARD. That's cheating. (*They wrestle for the ball, laughing, etc.*)

*(The front door opens and SISTER MARIA enters UC. She is an older woman who takes the business of being a nun quite seriously. She crosses down to FATHER CHARLES and FATHER RICHARD and doesn't say a word. A quite shocked expression is on her face.)*

FATHER CHARLES (*getting up quickly*). Good evening, Sister. We were just, uh...uh...

SISTER MARIA. There is no need to explain, Father. I shall return later when you are more prepared to face the problems of the parish. Bless you, Father. (*She crosses to the front door.*)

FATHER CHARLES (*crossing to SISTER MARIA*). Wait, Sister, you can talk to us now. (*But SISTER MARIA is quite intent on leaving.*)

FATHER RICHARD (*getting up, crossing to them*). Hey, Sister, I was just out in the parking lot. There are about twenty kids playing football. If you're not busy they need a tight end.

SISTER MARIA (*angry*). Someday, Father, I will be rewarded for my patience. (*She exits front door.*)

FATHER CHARLES. My goodness, we've done it again. She probably won't speak to us for a week.

FATHER RICHARD (*crossing to the sofa, sitting*). Now there's a blessing! You know she'll be back. She's in and out of here a hundred times a day.

FATHER CHARLES. I should go and apologize to her.  
(*Crosses toward the door.*)

FATHER RICHARD. Oh, forget it. She's probably going to watch a rerun of "The Flying Nun."

FATHER CHARLES. Well, I suppose she'll be all right.  
(*The telephone rings.*) What time is it? (*He crosses to the telephone.*)

FATHER RICHARD (*looking at his watch*). Almost six.  
(*FATHER CHARLES puts his hands on his hips and recites a ritual that is quite familiar around the rectory.*  
*FATHER RICHARD, bored, picks a magazine off the coffee table and reads.*)

FATHER CHARLES. "Hello, Mrs. Atkins. How are you? I'm fine, thanks. How is your husband? That's fine. He's fine. No, thank you, we just ate." (*The telephone has been ringing all this time and FATHER CHARLES finally decides to answer it.*) Good evening, Holy Family Rectory ... Hello, Mrs. Atkins. How are you? ... I'm fine, thanks. How is your husband? ... That's fine. How are your children? ... All nine of them? ... That's fine ... (*He looks at FATHER RICHARD, who gives an anticipatory wave.*) He's fine. We just finished supper a little while ago, but thanks, anyway ... Thursday night? I don't see why not. (*Putting his hand on the receiver, talks to FATHER RICHARD.*) She wants to know if we'll come to dinner Thursday night.

FATHER RICHARD (*disinterested*). What's she having?

FATHER CHARLES. What are you having?... (*To FATHER RICHARD.*) Spaghetti.

FATHER RICHARD. We can make it.

FATHER CHARLES. It's a date... Informal dress? Well, we'll just wear basic black. Thanks again, Mrs. Atkins.

*(He hangs up the telephone and sits on the edge of the desk.)* She's great to us. We really shouldn't make fun of her.

FATHER RICHARD. Without her and Sister Maria, life would become dull.

FATHER CHARLES. Yes, they're one of the world's great duos.

FATHER RICHARD. When they get together, I wonder who gets driven crazy first? Probably Sister Maria—she can't take a joke.

FATHER CHARLES. Yes, I can attest to that.

FATHER RICHARD *(rising, crossing to FATHER CHARLES)*. I can see them now. *(He imitates Mrs. Atkins.)* "Hello, Sister. I just baked eight thousand donuts for the charity bazaar." *(FATHER RICHARD prods FATHER CHARLES into imitating Sister Maria. FATHER CHARLES is a little slow at first, but finally gets the idea.)*

FATHER CHARLES *(imitating Sister Maria)*. "Bless you, Mrs. Atkins... and bless your donuts!"

FATHER RICHARD *(as Mrs. Atkins)*. "And forty-five thousand pies for bingo!"

FATHER CHARLES *(as Sister Maria)*. "Bless you... and your pies!"

FATHER RICHARD *(as Mrs. Atkins)*. "And a million buns for the fun of it."

FATHER CHARLES *(as Sister Maria)*. "Bless you and your buns, and the dough that made your buns. Bless me. Bless everything." *(They laugh at their joke, quite proud of themselves.)*

FATHER RICHARD *(crossing to the sofa)*. Boy, are they a pair. Mrs. Atkins is in a class all by herself. My first day in the parish she called me up and asked me what time

eight o'clock Mass started. That, as she explained, was her way of welcoming the new priest into the parish.

FATHER CHARLES (*sitting at the desk*). She didn't do it to me.

FATHER RICHARD. I saved you. I told her you were extremely hard of hearing, that you might take her seriously.

FATHER CHARLES (*reflecting*). No wonder she screamed at me my first two weeks here.

FATHER RICHARD. The first time you heard her confession was great. (*He cups his mouth and shouts.*) "Bless me, Father!" You could hear her two blocks away.

FATHER CHARLES. It was never like that in those Bing Crosby movies.

FATHER RICHARD (*looking at his watch*). Well, now that Mrs. Atkins has called, your mother should be on the phone anytime now. (*Rises and gets a newspaper off the table. He crosses to the easy chair and sits.*)

FATHER CHARLES (*upset*). Don't worry about my mother. (*He sorts through some of the papers on the desk, and finally picks up some notes.*) Did Mrs. Murphy give you these telephone messages?

FATHER RICHARD. No, who are they from?

FATHER CHARLES. The first one is from a young lady.

FATHER RICHARD. Any message?

FATHER CHARLES. Just, "I love you." She didn't leave her name.

FATHER RICHARD (*smiling*). Oh.

FATHER CHARLES (*waiting*). Well, who is she?

FATHER RICHARD. You don't know her.

FATHER CHARLES (*rising*). Tell me about her.

FATHER RICHARD. A secret admirer—that's all.

FATHER CHARLES (*crossing to him*). That's all! Aren't you going to tell me who she is?

FATHER RICHARD. No.

FATHER CHARLES. Going to play one of your games, huh? Not going to tell me?

FATHER RICHARD. No.

FATHER CHARLES. Come on, tell me.

FATHER RICHARD. No.

FATHER CHARLES (*disgusted, crosses back to the desk, sits*). OK, don't tell me. (*A long pause. Finally FATHER RICHARD rises and crosses to FATHER CHARLES. He gets nose to nose with him.*)

FATHER RICHARD. I won't. (*FATHER CHARLES sits frustrated for a few moments. Getting back to business, he picks up another message.*)

FATHER CHARLES. The other one's from Harold Mott. You're supposed to go and see him sometime next week.

FATHER RICHARD. OK. Thanks.

FATHER CHARLES. Isn't he the president of the Knights of Columbus?

FATHER RICHARD. Yes, I've been making speeches over there. Every Wednesday night. I've grown to look forward to it.

FATHER CHARLES. So that's where you've been going on Wednesdays.

FATHER RICHARD. Most of the time. Last week I got there late and they were showing a video—*The Making of the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue*. I pretended to be shocked and ran out. (*Pause.*) Anything else? (*He starts back across the room.*)

FATHER CHARLES (*picking a letter up from the desk*). I forgot to tell you about the bishop's letter. When you

say Mass tomorrow, remind the ushers we're going to take up two collections.

FATHER RICHARD (*annoyed, starting back to FATHER CHARLES*). We are? What for?

FATHER CHARLES. According to Bishop Bungy's letter they still need more money to complete the improvements on the seminary. All of the second collections in the diocese are going to the fund.

FATHER RICHARD (*angry*). Hasn't the bishop heard about inflation and unemployment?

FATHER CHARLES. Don't start.

FATHER RICHARD. The bishop has enough money.

FATHER CHARLES (*amazed*). What makes you say those kinds of things.

FATHER RICHARD. The bishop's new car makes me say those kinds of things. Six months in the diocese and he's driving a new Cadillac.

FATHER CHARLES (*rising*). I told you before, the new car was a gift from one of the parishioners who happens to be very wealthy.

FATHER RICHARD. A likely story. I think he's got his hand in the till.

FATHER CHARLES (*upset*). How can you make an accusation like that?

FATHER RICHARD (*ribbing him*). Because I was thinking of it myself.

FATHER CHARLES. He isn't stealing from anyone and you know it.

FATHER RICHARD. How comes he isn't driving a used car?

FATHER CHARLES. Would you turn down a free Cadillac?

FATHER RICHARD. I wouldn't turn down a free skateboard!

FATHER CHARLES (*exasperated*). Lord have mercy!

FATHER RICHARD. Well, you've never heard of a bishop declaring bankruptcy, have you? Especially ours.

FATHER CHARLES (*sermon time*). I'm tired of arguing with you every week. When are you going to stop playing superpriest? Champion of the people! Defender of the underdog! It doesn't work that way. You have to understand that every priest who gets ordained is like you in the beginning. I was. (*FATHER RICHARD has heard it before. Bored, he crosses to the sofa and sits.*) Now will you tell the ushers or will I have to?

FATHER RICHARD. All right. All right. I'll do it. I'll sacrifice, but I won't like it.

FATHER CHARLES. What would the pope say if he heard you talk like that?

FATHER RICHARD (*mumbles in Italian*). *Mama mia escuela es tutso!*

FATHER CHARLES (*falling for it*). What does that mean?

FATHER RICHARD. What we have here is a failure to excommunicate. (*FATHER CHARLES throws his arms into the air in aggravation.*) When are we going to meet the bishop?

FATHER CHARLES (*crossing to the desk*). I don't know.

FATHER RICHARD. That's funny. He's been here six months now and he's never shown up.

FATHER CHARLES (*taking some things off the desk, crossing to filing cabinet*). Let's leave well enough alone. From what I hear you won't want to meet him.

FATHER RICHARD. How's that?