

Week 30 Ordinary Time - 2026

Exodus 22:20-26, Ps 17; Tess 1:5-10; Matt 22:34-40

I was browsing through the Catholic Herald *earlier this week and I read an article marking that it was 40 years since the film 'The Mission'* had been launched in UK cinemas. I had not seen the film then, nor in any of the intervening years. It never interested me. But the article did. The journalist said two things that piqued my interest. The first was that it took Catholicism seriously, the second that it made the author dream about becoming a Jesuit priest.¹ So I watched the film.

Just in case you also have not seen this film I will try not to give too much away. The location is mostly in the South American rain-forest where Guarani indigenous people live, just on the outskirts of the encroaching Portuguese and Spanish territorial interest. The film opens in lush, beautiful jungle with the Guarani tribesmen tying a Jesuit missionary to a cross and sending him to float downriver and over a water fall to his death. Then we meet one of the main characters: Fr Gabriel. Fr Gabriel is the local lead Jesuit missionary, and in response to this killing, he himself climbs up into Guarani territory to live amongst them and bring the message of Christ to them.

We also encounter Mendoza, who is a wealthy Spaniard, but also a mercenary and slave trader. In a fit of rage he kills his brother, whom he loves. His world implodes. Fr. Gabriel offers him penance and

redemption. Mendoza's act of penance is to take his armour, his weapons, his boots – all the symbols of his power and prestige- tie them up in a bundle of rope and drag them through the jungle, the mud and rivers, up the water falls and to the Jesuit mission house amongst the Guarani. There he kneels exhausted and broken amongst the people he once tried to enslave. One of the Guarani takes a knife puts it to Mendoza's throat, and then cuts away the burden, letting it fall away over the cliff and into the roar of the river below.

The story is fictional, but it based on real events: the passion that the Jesuits and other Catholic missionaries had for the proclamation of the Gospel, and the incredible lengths to which they would go, and hardships they would endure, is well documented. Look at the lives of St Peter Claver² who worked amongst the slaves who disembarked at Cartagena in the most wretched of conditions, or Jose de Anchieta³ who baptised as many as a million Indians in Brazil and tried to protect them from slavery. Two real life examples of missionary zeal joined with heroic poverty, penance, defence of human dignity, and joy.

How did the film take Catholicism seriously? Well, in my viewing experience of modern cinema, Catholics are usually portrayed as, hypocritical, emotionally wet, or two dimensional. Faith is considered childish, medieval, or slavish; penance is portrayed as a veil neuroticism, or a cheap get out of jail free card. The two fairly recent films *Conclave*, and *The Two Popes* reveal a preoccupation with the world's issues of

¹ <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/what-happened-to-the-jesuits> accessed 23 Oct 2026

² St. Peter Claver (1581–1654) A Spanish-born Jesuit who spent his entire priestly ministry in Cartagena, Colombia — the main port of entry for enslaved Africans in South America. He called himself "the slave of the slaves forever" and ministered to hundreds of thousands of enslaved people, baptizing, healing, and advocating for their dignity.

³ St. José de Anchieta (1534–1597) Jesuit priest and missionary who went to Brazil. He learned the Tupi language, wrote its first grammar, composed poems and plays to evangelize. He is called the "Apostle of Brazil."

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today rather than anything theologically substantial or eternal: it is just not on the film-makers agenda. Perhaps they are just incapable of understanding. The columnist, Luke Collins, sums it up well: *'It seems that film-makers have little difficulty reproducing the vestments, incense and Sistine Chapel, but rather more difficulty imagining intelligent men who genuinely believe the Creed.'*⁴

The film *'The Mission'* is set in 1773, just before the suppression of the Jesuits, when the Jesuits still knew what they were about and they stood for. It was a time when they quietly served the Church: built schools, educated the poor and the rich, gave council to kings, enraged tyrants... and sent missionaries to the ends of the known world. Much of that is gone now. In our brief period of being the modern world, the Jesuit order has largely surrendered to identity politics and being humanitarian rather than converting souls and being Christ like. It is not just a Jesuit curse, it is a Church wide curse. Really a curse: an ill spoken word with power to harm.

Watching the film, *'The Mission'* made me re-read the lines of today's Gospel over and over *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all you should and with all your mind... And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'*⁵ This film understood that. Yes, the film was a work of the imagination, but an imagination inspired by real heroic love of Jesus, and an understanding of his commandment. It reminded me of St Therese of Lisieux who wrote:

'I feel the vocation of the WARRIOR, THE PRIEST, THE APOSTLE, THE DOCTOR, THE MARTYR. FINALLY, I feel the need and desire of carrying out the most heroic deeds for *You, O Jesus*. I feel within my soul the courage of the *Crusader*, the

Papal Guard, and I would want to die on the field of battle in defences of the Church.'⁶ (emphasis is Therese's)

This is a million miles away with some areas of some of the Church hierarchy's current obsession, with what is called 'lived experience' and synodality; that is to say anti-Christ.

If you should ask me what my vision is for the parish, it is this: above all an heroic love of God. If you should ask me what path you should choose, it is the same: a heroic love of God. That is our Parish Mission. That is our Blessing.

⁴ <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/the-mission-at-40-when-hollywood-took-catholicism-seriously> accessed 24 Oct 2026

⁵ Matt 22: 37-39

⁶ SSt Therese of Lisieux, *'Story of a Soul'* (ICS Publication, Washington DC, 1996) p 192