

FULL OF GRACE

by

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Cast:

Fr. James Brennigan..... Male, mid-40s, a priest.

Fr. Peter Tyler ..... Male, late-20s, a priest.

Kathy Oakes..... Female, early-20s. A tourist.

Place:

New Orleans

Time:

The present, around noon on Mardi Gras.

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(Lights up on a church office. Peter comes running in from right carrying a box containing palm fronds)

BRENNIGAN

Oh, thank you, Peter. You saved my back a—

TYLER

It's a miracle, Father Brennigan!

BRENNIGAN

What is?

TYLER

(Shows him the box with the fronds)

Last year's palm fronds.

BRENNIGAN

(Rising, painfully)

Let me see...no, they can't be. Those aren't a year old. Ouch.

TYLER

They're in the box marked "Ash Wednesday fronds." Look how they've been preserved.

BRENNIGAN

Someone is playing a joke on you. I should go up there myself.

TYLER

It's a miracle! The miracle of the Incorruptible Fronds!

BRENNIGAN

It isn't a miracle.

TYLER

How do you know?

BRENNIGAN

Because I know.

TYLER

We should call the bishop. Just in case.

BRENNIGAN

You always want to call the bishop! You have a dream about St. Paul, and you want to call the bishop. A candle burns longer than you think it should and you want to call the bishop.

TYLER

But this really seems miraculous.

BRENNIGAN

When a miracle happens, I will tell you. But we are not going to call the bishop over some fronds that didn't turn brown on schedule. Right now, all I care about is getting some dry fronds to burn for tomorrow's service.

TYLER

Well...let's ask Father Adolphus at St. Lucia if he has any...

BRENNIGAN

Adolphus? That greedy old...I mean...Father Adolphus has had a lifetime struggle with the sin of avarice. I don't think he'd been willing to share.

TYLER

Hmmm...and we couldn't burn something else?

BRENNIGAN

Something else?

TYLER

Some newspapers or something...

BRENNIGAN

Father Tyler! I know you've been a priest for only two months, but really! You should know better.

TYLER

Well of course we should use the Palm Sunday fronds whenever possible. But we need the ashes tomorrow.

BRENNIGAN

It's the way things are done. Those fronds have been blessed! Do you expect me to bless the sports section?

(Kathy enters, limping)

TYLER

(Puts box on desk)

I'll call some of the other parishes...excuse me, may I help you?

KATHY

Pardon me for disturbing you but...

BRENNIGAN

Yes, my child?

KATHY

I'm sorry, but this is difficult.

TYLER

Are you all right? You're limping.

KATHY

I twisted my ankle last night.

BRENNIGAN

Please sit down.

(Tyler gets Kathy a chair, and she sits)

KATHY

Thank you. My name is Kathy, by the way.

TYLER

I'm Father Tyler, and this is Father Brennigan.

BRENNIGAN

What can we do for you, Kathy?

KATHY

I need to know: what sins are permitted on Mardi Gras?

BRENNIGAN

Excuse me?

KATHY

I'm here visiting New Orleans for Mardi Gras, and I'd like to know...what sins are permitted.

BRENNIGAN

No sins are permitted. That's why they're called sins.

KATHY

Then, why the party?

BRENNIGAN

Most people are here for the...debauchery, my child. Not for any real sort of pre-Lenten observance.

TYLER

But if you did sin, well...we'll be hearing confession from 9:00 to 11:00 tomorrow morning, and again in the afternoon. There's a mass at noon, and another at 5:30.

KATHY

Confession?

BRENNIGAN

Yes...

KATHY

I've never done that before.

TYLER

You've never...my child, are you Catholic?

KATHY

No. I was raised Baptist...

BRENNIGAN

Baptist!?!

KATHY

But I haven't been to church in a few years. Oh, except for that service my grandmother took me to in December...

TYLER

Oh. Is she Catholic?

KATHY

No, uh...

BRENNIGAN

What...she's not Lutheran, is she?

KATHY

No.

BRENNIGAN

That's good.

KATHY

Neo-Pagan.

BRENNIGAN

Oh. I need to sit down.

TYLER

Why come here? There's a Baptist church down on Napoleon.

BRENNIGAN

Oh don't send her there. Their minister is so uptight. My child, you should go see...what's his name...Howard Taylor! Howard Taylor at Immanuel Baptist in Metarie. Howard, at least, knows what Ash Wednesday is. I wonder if *he* has any fronds to spare...



KATHY

But I was told to come here.

TYLER

Come here? By who?

KATHY

A clerk at the hotel. When she saw me this morning, she told me that at her temple, she saw a vision of a limping woman. This woman would go to St. John of the Cross parish on St. Charles Avenue to repent of her sins. So she gave me directions.

TYLER

They have visions at Jewish temples?

KATHY

Voodoo, actually.

TYLER

Oh.

(Pause. Tyler and Kathy look at Brennigan)  
BRENNIGAN

What? You think I've served in New Orleans for five years and never heard of voodoo before? More voodoo practitioners in New Orleans than Lutherans, that's for sure.

KATHY

Grandma received a message from her spirit guide that I was supposed to go on a spiritual quest.

BRENNIGAN

My child...

KATHY

And Dad is always hassling me to go to church.

BRENNIGAN

Kathy! Don't worry about it. Uh...how long are you going to be in town?

KATHY

Just until tomorrow.

BRENNIGAN

Well...all right. We can talk about Catholicism while Father Tyler goes to look for palm fronds.

KATHY

Palm fronds?

BRENNIGAN

Fronds from Palm Sunday last year.

(Indicates box)

We're supposed to burn these to make ashes for Ash Wednesday.

TYLER

They've been preserved!

KATHY

What's Ash Wednesday?

(Picks up frond)

BRENNIGAN

Oh for the love...it's the start of Lent. The period of Christian repentance?

(Kathy shrugs)

BRENNIGAN

Protestants.

TYLER

That's why everybody's celebrating. Party tonight, repent tomorrow.

KATHY

I see. Well, I don't think you can burn these. They're far too green.

BRENNIGAN

Yes. Father Tyler thinks it's a miracle.

TYLER

I was just saying...

KATHY

That's funny.

TYLER

What?

KATHY

My ankle is tingling.

(Kathy gets up, no longer limping)

TYLER

Careful!

KATHY

It's all right...my ankle doesn't hurt anymore!

BRENNIGAN

Well, you've been off it.

KATHY

But it's been hurting all day. Then I picked up the frond and...  
(Walking around, no limping)

Now it's fine. Absolutely fine.

BRENNIGAN

I see. Well, good for you. Now...

TYLER

Father Brennigan, do you think...

KATHY

This is amazing.

BRENNIGAN

Do I think what?

TYLER

This could be a sign!

KATHY

A sign?

BRENNIGAN

Absolutely not. I'm sure this young lady's ankle was not nearly as badly twisted as she thought, and...

KATHY

Are you saying the palm frond healed me?

BRENNIGAN  
(Stands)

No!

TYLER

No. God healed you. Through the frond.

BRENNIGAN  
(Brennigan takes frond from Kathy)

God did no such thing.

KATHY

It's true. He did!

My child.  
BRENNIGAN

KATHY  
(Loudly)  
Praise Jesus! Hallelujah! It's a miracle.

BRENNIGAN  
(Brennigan walks, free of pain)  
Oh don't start shouting. This is a *Catholic* church. I...

TYLER  
Father Brennigan! Your back!

BRENNIGAN  
What?

TYLER  
You don't look like you're in pain.

BRENNIGAN  
Oh...

TYLER  
Has your back been healed?

BRENNIGAN  
It's feeling a little better, but...

TYLER  
My God...it's true! It *is* a miracle!

KATHY  
Hallelujah!

TYLER  
Gloria in Excelsis Deo!

BRENNIGAN  
Stop it! Both of you.

TYLER  
We should call the bishop immediately! Two miracles in two minutes!

KATHY  
I'm going to go out right now and tell the world!

BRENNIGAN

What?

KATHY

I understand now! I understand why I was sent here! I'm going to go down to, what's it called...Jackson Square! I'm going to go down to Jackson Square and tell everyone what God has done for me.

BRENNIGAN

Right in front of the cathedral. The bishop will love that.

KATHY

Praise Jesus! I'm going right now. Can I take a frond with me?

BRENNIGAN

No!

TYLER

Kathy, we should wait until the bishop certifies this.

KATHY

No! We should tell the people immediately.

BRENNIGAN

Kathy, no. Wait. It will cause a mob here. Just like every time an image of the Blessed Virgin appears in some plaster or a pancake. I...we can't handle it.

KATHY

But I could start healing people .

TYLER

It's God who's doing the healing.

BRENNIGAN

There is going to be no healing! By anyone! Give me those  
(Takes fronds)

I'm going to burn these right now.

KATHY

What?

TYLER

Father!

BRENNIGAN

I'll get the grill out back so hot it won't matter how green these fronds are.

No!  
KATHY

Father Brennigan, you can't...  
TYLER

BRENNIGAN  
Father Tyler. I am the senior priest at this parish. You are my assistant. You will do as you are told. And you, young lady...go ahead and tell people. Once I've burned these things, you'll have no proof.

You have no right. Give me those!  
KATHY  
(Kathy and Fr. Brennigan struggle over the box of fronds)

Let go!  
BRENNIGAN  
(The box slips. Fronds are everywhere. Kathy grabs one)

Got it! See you later!  
KATHY  
(Starts running towards exit, but Fr. Tyler blocks the door)

Hey!  
BRENNIGAN  
Stop! Please stop! Kathy, please. I'm sorry but...I just can't have crowds of miracle seekers at my church.

I'm sure it won't be that bad.  
TYLER

Of course it will. Just like last time...  
BRENNIGAN

Last time?  
KATHY

It's just...nothing.  
BRENNIGAN

Father, has this happened here before?  
TYLER

No.  
BRENNIGAN

TYLER

Then what...

BRENNIGAN

Not here, but...

KATHY

Where? What happened?

BRENNIGAN

When I was eight I...I had a dream. About the Blessed Virgin. A silly child's dream. But I told a Sister at school about it and...

TYLER

What?

BRENNIGAN

Word got out. People called it a "vision." I said something that...that people claimed was a prediction about the future.

TYLER

But why would...?

BRENNIGAN

And then my childhood ended. Ended! People came from everywhere. Asking my advice. Asking me to bless things. No, *demanding* that I bless things. In the end, my family had to move. We even had to change our names.

KATHY

How terrible.

BRENNIGAN

And then again, at my first parish. I discovered that one of the statues had never been consecrated. So the bishop had me consecrate it. The next day, it started to weep.

TYLER

Was that at a cathedral in...Florida?

BRENNIGAN

You've heard about it. People made such a fuss, I had to leave. And then...and then...Timmy...

TYLER

Timmy?

BRENNIGAN

A boy with cancer. At my last parish. Timmy's parents asked me to pray for him. A

month later, full remission. People heard about this, then they found out about Florida. So I left again. It's just...this just keeps happening. All I've ever wanted is a quiet life.

KATHY

Well I...I see but...you can't keep this from people.

BRENNIGAN

Just watch me.

TYLER

Father Brennigan. James...let me take these to the bishop. Let him handle it. We don't have to have crowds here. You don't have to deal with this. But it's wrong to keep this...whatever it is, a secret. Or to destroy it.

BRENNIGAN

But I...Fine. Take it.

KATHY

What about me?

BRENNIGAN

What about you?

KATHY

I still want to tell people about what happened to me.

BRENNIGAN

You will have plenty of chances to do that. But let me give a piece of advice. Go out tonight. Enjoy the celebrations, and your last hours of anonymity. It may be a long time before you can go someplace like Bourbon St. again. Or...

KATHY

Yes?

BRENNIGAN

If you decide just to walk away, I'll understand.

KATHY

(Gives frond to Fr. Brennigan)

I'll think about it.

BRENNIGAN

Good. Father Tyler, if you'll please show Kathy out.

TYLER

Of course.

(Tyler and Kathy exit)



All right. You win.

BRENNIGAN  
(Sits.Looks up.)

(Lights down)

THE END