

HUMOR

Mass appeal

Praying with the enemy

When I was 8, my parents hired a cleaning woman. I had been a latchkey kid already for two years, but while apparently my 11-year-old brother and I didn't require anyone to look after us, my parents decided the house itself was being neglected.

I, for one, was thrilled at the prospect. Having subsisted on a steady diet of *Nanny and the Professor*, *The Brady Bunch*, *Hazel* and *The Courtship of Eddie's Father*, I felt certain I knew what to expect from domestic help. Not only had I seen *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music*, I had memorized the soundtrack albums. (I know, how gay is that?)

I was thoroughly prepared for some merry maid to sweep into our quiet, empty house and suddenly transform our lives with just a spoonful of sugar.

Imagine my disappointment when I finally met Florence, a chain smoker with a bad perm who spent more time bitching to me about her ex-husband than cleaning the house. I sought solace in the company of a woman named Sara Lee instead. A poundful of sugar helps the medicine go down.

Which leads me to how I became a Catholic.

You see, insane as it might sound, I actually chose to convert as an adult. Being Italian, of course, I was familiar with the church, but I wasn't raised in the faith.

Now I hang with a fairly liberal crowd, so I was pretty embarrassed when I converted. For a while, I had the rare distinction of being openly gay and a closeted Catholic.

People ask me all the time how I can possibly belong to a church that doesn't want me as a member. I refer them to *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music*.

You see, with the notable exception of *Victor/Victoria*, poor Julie Andrews never shook

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARC

by Marc Acito



the image of Mary/Maria. I think she failed to understand the huge impact these films have on people's lives.

In both movies, a loving maternal (but virginal) figure whose name happens to be the same as Jesus' mother descends (one from the sky, the other from a mountain) onto an unhappy, dysfunctional family and fills the spirit of everyone she encounters. If that's not enough to convince you of the spiritual significance, I'll remind you that one of the characters is a nun.

It's everywhere, really, this Mary thing. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, right? Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow. Coincidence? I think not.

F. Scott Fitzgerald said, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." Then again, like many a Catholic, he drank himself to death.

My liberal crowd gets very threatened by my faith, although I remind them that the Kennedys are also liberal and Catholic. One

could argue that they haven't fared too well, either, but that's another matter.

I had a nervous breakdown in 1996. Actually, truth be told, being wound as tight as I am, I've had a number of minor meltdowns in my life, but this was the full-tilt, crying-for-three-days, can't-leave-the-house variety.

I turned to my friend Paul for strength and guidance.

He had weathered years of watching his partner deteriorate from AIDS and yet still maintained an unshakable conviction in his faith.

I poured out my heart, telling Paul of my longing for the church of my ancestors (OK, and the church of Maria, too) and of my resentment against it for its exclusion of me. And I asked him that same question everyone asks me now: "How do you belong to a church that doesn't want you as a member?"

Paul looked me straight in the eye and said



with stunning simplicity, "It's my Jesus, too."

I, for one, do not understand why any sensible person, straight or gay, would want to join the Republican Party, for instance, but I'm sure those queer folks who do feel the same way: It's my party, and I'll lie if I want to.

Let's be honest about the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church.

These are the folks who brought us the Inquisition and who tell poor women in developing countries not to use birth control. But Catholics are also the first to step up to protest a death sentence and give food and shelter to the poorest of the poor.

When I step up to receive communion, I feel filled with the holy host and am

less likely to eat a whole Sara Lee cake when I'm upset. But I also know that when others see me worshipping among them, it becomes that much more difficult for them to harden their hearts to gay people.

It's my Jesus, too.

And that, my friends, is *The Gospel According to Marc*. ☐

MARC ACITO wishes you all a merry whatever. E-mail him at marcacito@atbi.com.

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