

Published March 18th, 2020

'Corpus Christi' challenges our perceptions of good and evil

By Sophie Braccini



Image provided

A strangely beautiful, though sometimes violent film from Poland is coming to Orinda March 27 as part of the International Film Showcase. For Christians, spiritual people and non-believers alike, the film asks questions about redemption, faith, truth and social order. The movie, which is both very simple and complex, will undoubtedly touch movie goers.

In a small town in today's Poland, a sick priest is replaced at a moment's notice by Daniel, a 20-year-old imposter, who steps into the role almost despite himself. The community, which was recently traumatized by a tragic event, welcomes the novelty offered to it. Is the young ex-juvenile convict a manipulator, is he enlightened by his faith, or does he simply want to be somebody for once in his life? Whatever the reason, the deeply wounded community finds help through him and begins to heal.

Daniel (Bartocz Bielenic) is not a evil imposter, he is not seeking money or revenge. He is sincere. He wanted to become a priest, but his criminal past barred him from ever being able to enter a seminary. He is portrayed as young, sometimes filled with the light of pure faith. He is like an angel at a crossroads - one side probable damnation; the other, possible redemption. The scenario was based on a true story and evolves like a spiritual quest. Daniel has what he wanted, his wish has come

true, but he must now face the consequences. As he gets more and more involved with his parishioners, he goes further along the road of deceiving.

Jan Komasa's film is set in a small town where an immemorial order still seems to prevail. Money, church and social order have always advanced hand-in-hand. The story challenges the model, suggesting that truth might be on the side of the young imposter. He is sincere and seems to get his words from Christ himself. We have known for some time that nowadays clothes do make the man, but should faith be stronger than law? Maybe Komasa also wants to tell us to beware of the passionate leader who can manipulate crowds for better or for worse.

The choice of Bielenic to interpret Daniel was key to the effectiveness of the film. In an interview during the Mostra a Venezia, the director said that role required someone different in a charismatic way. Bielenic is a experimental theater actor, someone Komasa calls a real artist with angel eyes. He is also quite versatile, giving realism to this very complex character, constantly oscillating between guilt and faith.

The film set in the little Polish town speaks also to us about ourselves, how we are quick to judge, ostracize, categorize between good and bad without nuance. It talks about our shared humanity and desire to heal.

"Corpus Christi" was nominated to the 92nd Academy Awards in the Best International Feature Film category. Bielenic won the award for Best Actor at the Chicago International Film Festival and Stockholm International Film Festival; he also won the Shooting Stars Award for the most promising up-and-coming European actor. The movie will play for one week at the Orinda Theatre starting on March 27. More information at www.orindamovies.com

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